A Runaway Brig

Homer Davis
Bob Polkinghorn

Harry pointed seaward, toward the brigantine, moving through the water slowly.—(See page 9.)

A RUNAWAY BRIG;

OR,

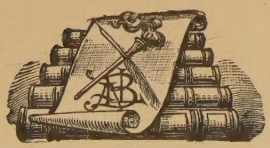
An Accidental Cruise.

By JAMES OTIS,

Author of

"The Castaways," "Toby Tyler," "Mr. Stubbs' Brother," "Left Behind," "Raising the Pearl," "Silent Pete," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED.



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CHAPTER I.

THE SALLY WALKER.

I'M GOING down to the beach to find Jim Libby. If you'll come along we'll have a prime sail; and most likely this is the last chance we shall have to go out with him, for his vessel leaves in the morning."

"How can I go when I've got to mind this young one all the forenoon just 'cause the nurse must go an' have a sick headache? I don't believe she feels half as bad as I do!" And Walter Morse looked mournfully out over the blue waters with but little care for his baby sister, who was already toddling dangerously near the long flight of steps leading from the veranda of the large summer hotel.

"Can't you coax off for a couple of hours?" the first speaker, Harry Vandyne, asked.

"It's no use. Mother has gone to ride, and said I was to stay here until she came back."

Harry started toward the beach, determined not to lose a single hour of pleasure because of his friend's engagements; but before he had taken

half a dozen steps a sudden, and what seemed like a very happy thought, occurred to him.

"I'll tell you how it can be fixed. Hire one of the other nurses to take care of your sister till we get back. Any of them will do it for a quarter, an' we'll be home before your mother comes."

The boys were spending the summer at the Isle of Shoals, off the New England coast. Harry's father was Robert Vandyne, the well-known ship-owner of New York, and Walter's was equally prominent in the wholesale dry-goods business on Broadway. During their stay at this summer resort they had made the acquaintance of Jim Libby, "cook's assistant and everybody's mate" on the fishing-schooner Mary Walker, a craft which visited the Shoals once each week to supply the hotels with fresh fish.

Jim was at liberty to follow the dictates of his own fancy several hours each day while in port, and the boys found him ever ready to take them out sailing in the square-bowed, leaky tender belonging to the schooner. As Harry had said, this was Jim's last day on the island until the end of another cruise, and Walter was so eager to blister his hands and wet his feet once more by rowing the Sally Walker—the tender was dignified with a name—around the shore that he really did not stop to consider all Harry's advice implied.

He wanted to go on the water; Bessie would have even better care from one of the nurses than he could give her; and it was not difficult to convince

himself that, under all the circumstances, he would be warranted in disobeying the positive commands of his mother.

"She didn't know Jim was going away in the morning, or I'm sure she'd 'a' fixed it so's I could take one more trip in the Sally."

"Of course she won't care," Harry said in such a decided tone that Walter, who was more than willing to be convinced by the most flimsy argument, made his decision at once.

"Come on; there's Mrs. Harvey's maid, and we'll ask her."

The bribe of twenty-five cents was sufficient to enlist the good-natured girl's sympathies, and five minutes later the two boys were running at full speed toward the shore, while Bessie, apparently well content with the change of nurses, looked so happy that Walter really began to believe he had done the child such a very great favor that his mother could not but be pleased.

The unwieldy-looking Sally Walker was drawn up in a little cove which, owing to a line of rocks just outside, made a most convenient landing-place, and on the bow sat Master Jim, his face striped with dirt but beaming with good-nature, and his clothes as ragged as they were redolent of fish.

"I'd jes' begun to think you couldn't come, an' was goin' back," he cried as his neatly-dressed acquaintances came into view. "If we wanter do any sailin' it's time to be off, 'cause this wind's dyin' out mighty fast."

"It's better late than never, Jim," Harry cried cheerily as he commenced to push at the bow of the boat. "Let's get the old craft afloat, and do our talking afterward."

To launch the Sally into deep water was quite a hard task owing to her breadth of beam; but after that had been done the labor was ended for a time, save such as might be necessary with the bailing-dish.

Jim stepped the short mast with its well-worn leg-of-mutton sail, got one of the oars aft as a rudder, and the full-bowed clipper began to move through the water slowly, but with a splashing and a wake sufficient for a craft ten times her size.

"We can't run along the coast very well 'cause the wind's blowin' straight out to sea, an' she don't stand up to it like a narrower boat would," the skipper said as he settled himself back comfortably in the stern-sheets while he pulled the fragment of a straw hat down over his eyes.

"Let's sail before the wind two or three miles and then row back," Walter suggested. "I'd like to get to the hotel before mother comes."

"It'll be a tough pull," Jim replied as he glanced at the clumsy oars. "I'd rather row the Sally one mile than two."

Harry and I will do that part of the work."

"Then let her go," and as Jim eased off on the sheet the old craft came around slowly, for she was by no means prompt in answering the helm.

"See that ship over there? How far away is

she?" Harry asked as he pointed seaward, when the Sally was well under way.

"That ain't a ship," Jim replied with a slight tone of contempt because his companions were so ignorant. "She's a brigantine, an' hard on to three miles from here."

"Let's run over to where she is. We can row back by dinner-time easily enough."

Since his crew were to do all the work on the return trip Jim would have been perfectly willing had the distance been twice as far, and he gave assent by nodding his head in what he intended should be a truly nautical manner.

The brig, which was now the objective point of the trip, appeared to be a craft of about three hundred tons, and moving through the water slowly, under the influence of the rapidly-decreasing wind, on a course at right-angles with the one the Sally was pursuing. She was running with yards square, under her upper and lower topsails, foresail, jib and foretop-mast stay-sail, and the head-sheets were flowing.

"She ain't goin' so fast but what we can come up with her before the breeze dies away, I reckon, an' if she's becalmed they won't say anything agin our goin' aboard," Jim said after a few moments of silence, during which all hands gazed intently at the stranger.

The idea of visiting a vessel at sea was very enticing to the city boys, and they were now as eager for a calm as they had previously been to have the

wind freshen. The Sally took in so much water between her half-calked seams that it was necessary to keep the bailing-dish in constant use, consequently there was little time for speculation as to where the brig was bound until, when they had sailed not more than a mile and a half, Jim said in a tone of mild disappointment:

"It's no use, fellers, we can't get there. It's dead calm, an' we ain't makin' a foot an hour."

"What's to prevent our rowing?" Harry asked. "You take down the sail and keep the bailing-dish going while Walter and I show you how to make the Sally walk."

"I'm willin' if you are," and Jim unshipped the stumpy mast. "My vessel won't get under way before mornin', an' it makes no difference if I ain't back till sunrise."

To make the Sally "walk" required a great deal of hard work; but since it was under the guise of play Harry and Walter went at it with a will, while Jim wondered what sport boys could find in pulling a heavy boat, for this was the one portion of a fisherman's life at which he rebelled.

Slowly but surely the little craft gained upon the larger one, which swung to and fro on the lazy swell, and when they were about a quarter of a mile apart Jim said, in a tone of disapprobation:

"The crew on that brig are worse'n fishermen. Every one of 'em must be below, for I haven't seen so much as a feller's nose yet. Perhaps some of the crew have gone ashore—the gangway's unshipped."

Unacquainted with nautical matters as the city boys were, they did not think there was anything strange in such a condition of affairs, but kept steadily at work with the oars until Jim scrambled into the bow to fend off, the journey having been finished.

"I'll make fast here while you go aboard," he said as he seized the ladder of rope and wood which hung over the rail as an invitation to visitors.

"We'd better find out first whether they're willing to have us," Harry suggested.

"That'll be all right," and Jim spoke very confidently. "If you're afraid I'll go first; but it seems kinder strange that somebody don't hail us."

Having made the Sally's painter fast, Jim clambered over the side closely followed by his companions; but not a person could be seen on deck. The fore hatch was lying bottom upward, and the appearance of the ropes indicated decided carelessness on the part of the crew, yet no sound was heard save the creaking of the booms as they swung lazily to and fro.

"What's the matter?" Harry asked in a whisper as he noted the look of fear which came over Jim's face.

"I'm sure I don't know. Let's see if we can raise anybody;" and then Jim shouted, "Ahoy below! ahoy!"

No reply came. Again and again was the cry repeated, until Walter asked, impatiently:

"Are you afraid to go into the cabin and stir them up?"

Jim would have braved many dangers rather than be thought a coward, and without answering the question he leaped down from the rail, running first into the forecastle and then the cabin, after which he returned to his companions with a very pale face as he said, in a tremulous whisper:

"Boys, there ain't a single soul on this 'ere brig but ourselves, an' there's a sword on the cabin floor! Do you s'pose pirates are anywhere around?"

CHAPTER II.

THE BONITA.

HARRY and Walter remained motionless and speechless on the rail staring at Jim for several moments after this startling announcement had been made, and there was a decided look of fear on the faces of all three. The mere suggestion of pirates was enough to send the cold chills down their spinal columns, while the mystery connected with the abandonment of an apparently sound craft caused them to feel very uncomfortable in mind.

Walter glanced apprehensively over his shoulder as if expecting to see some terrible sight seaward, and the slightest ominous sound would have sent the visitors into the Sally as the only place of refuge.

It was fully five minutes before Harry succeeded in gaining the mastery over his fears, and then he said, with an evident attempt to make his voice sound firm as he leaped from the rail:

"Say, boys, we're making fools of ourselves by getting frightened at an empty ship! Suppose the pirates *have* been on board; there are none here now, and I don't see any reason why we shouldn't go below."

"I'm with you," Jim replied; but by taking up

his position at Harry's side he showed very plainly that it was not his intention to lead the exploring party.

"I'll go, too, rather than stay on deck alone; but, according to my way of thinking, we'd better start for the Isle of Shoals instead of staying on a vessel like this." And once more Walter looked over the rail at the Sally, which was taking in water quite rapidly now that the bailing-dish was idle.

Harry and Jim had started toward the cabin before Walter ceased speaking, therefore he had no choice save to follow them, and with an undefined feeling of awe the three went down the stairs into a comfortably but not expensively furnished saloon, from each side of which led the eight state-rooms.

To judge by the general appearance of affairs one would have said that the officers had but just gone on deck. On the long, stationary table were sewing materials and a woman's work-basket; in one of the chairs an open book, and on a locker was the log-slate with the reckoning partially worked out.

The only suspicious object to be seen was a sword, which had been withdrawn from its scabbard and thrown on the cabin floor. The blade was covered with spots which might have been blood-stains or nothing but rust, and the visitors gathered around the sinister-looking weapon without offering to touch it.

"The sword doesn't prove that pirates have been here," Harry said, after a long silence. "There couldn't have been much of a fight or we should see more signs of it. Perhaps somebody is in one of the state-rooms."

"It won't take long to find out." And Jim boldly opened the nearest door, a goodly portion of his courage having returned since the search thus far had failed to reveal any very horrible sight.

In rapid succession the searchers went from one room to another, stopping at each only long enough to make sure no person was concealed therein, and to take a general but hasty survey of its contents.

Every tiny apartment showed signs of recent occupancy. A sea-chest, clothes hanging on the walls, and such belongings as a sailor would deem necessary for a long voyage, could be seen. In one stateroom was a set of gold studs and sleeve-buttons and a new quadrant. In another, which Jim confidently asserted was the captain's, a watch hung at the head of the berth, while a small writing-desk was littered with papers.

"All hands have gone somewhere, that's certain," Jim said when the search was concluded; "an' before we go ashore it won't do any harm to have dinner. If the pantry has been left like the cabin, we stand a good chance of finding plenty of grub."

"I'm hungry enough to eat almost anything," Harry replied with a laugh. "So if you know where the food is kept we'll have lunch before beginning the long pull home."

Jim was thoroughly well acquainted with the general arrangement of vessels of this size, and without hesitation he led the way to the pantry, where was found a large assortment of delicacies for the cabin table.

In this room were many boxes and packages which had not been broken, and as each bore the mark "Brig Bonita," the name of the craft was known as well as if the boys had seen the gilt letters under the stern.

Just at this time, however, the visitors gave but little heed to anything connected with the abandoned craft save the provisions, and these they sampled generously, beginning with nuts and ending with jam; each one eating until it was an absolute impossibility to swallow another mouthful.

During the varied but hearty meal they failed to notice that the brig had heeled over slightly, or that there was considerable more motion than when they first came aboard. The feast drove all thoughts of the general condition of affairs from their minds until it was finished, and then Jim said:

"Now, what's to be done? It seems a pity to leave this craft and all these things; but I don't s'pose we could tow her in to the Shoals."

Even though Harry and Walter knew nothing about seamanship, they understood how ridiculous it would be to make any attempt at towing a three-hundred-ton brig with a crazy little boat like the Sally, and their merriment was so great when Jim made this remark that he thought it necessary to defend himself by saying:

"I've seen folks tow bigger vessels than this; an' I was only thinkin' how fine it would be to take her in, for since there's nobody aboard we'd own everything."

"Well, so long as it can't be done we'd better go back," Walter said as he suddenly remembered his neglect of duty and the very grave reason why he should be at the hotel before his mother returned.

Neither Harry nor Jim believed there was any necessity for making a hurried departure, and fully half an hour more elapsed before they were ready to go on deck. Even then they would have delayed still further had not a violent motion of the vessel caused Jim to cry, as he sprang toward the companion-way:

"The wind has freshened, and if we want to get back to-night it's time we were off!"

Then, as he gained the deck, fear and surprise took the place of his suddenly aroused anxiety. The wind had sprung up and must have done so a long while before, for now there was no sign of land in either direction, unless, indeed, a dark smudge far down to windward might be the island which had been so close aboard a few hours previous, and the Bonita was working on a zigzag course seaward. Owing to the fact that the head-sheets were flowing, each time she fell off sufficiently to get the wind abaft the beam she would fill her topsails and gather way, then come to, stop, and again fall off; making, as a sailor would say, "boards and half-boards."

Harry and Walter were so thoroughly amazed and alarmed by this sudden disappearance of the land, as it were, that they gave no heed to anything around them, but stood by the port rail amidships, searching in vain with their eyes for the island.

Jim's knowledge of seamanship was decidedly limited; but he understood fully why the Isle of Shoals was no longer in sight, and his one thought was how they could leave the vessel, which was literally running away with them. Springing to the main chains where the Sally had been made fast, a single glance was sufficient to show of what little service she would be to them just then. Leaking as she did, and towed now and then at a rapid rate, the little craft was filled with water, nothing save a very small portion of the bow upheld by the painter being visible.

Hardly knowing what he did, the young fisherman ran fore and aft in a distracted way until Harry, aroused from his stupefaction by Jim's apparently aimless movements, asked in a sharp tone of nervous irritation:

"What are you doing? Are we to stay here without trying to get back?"

"I wish you would tell me what we can do;" and Jim stopped short as he plunged his hands deeply in his pockets, looking Harry squarely in the face. "The Isle of Shoals must be a dozen miles away by this time; the Sally is swamped, an' there's nothin' in the shape of a boat on board."

"But we *can't* stay here and be carried out to sea!" Walter cried in a shrill tone of fear.

"If you think it's possible to swim back we won't stay; but I don't know of any other way to get there!"

For an instant Walter acted as if he intended to

make the attempt; and then, as Harry seized his arm to prevent him from leaping overboard, the poor boy gave way to the most passionate grief. He began to realize the full consequences of his disobedience, and could he have been transported to the land just at that moment, Bessie would have opened her eyes wide in surprise at the great display of brotherly affection.

It seemed as if Walter's tears served to restore to Jim at least a portion of his senses, for he immediately assumed a business-like tone as he said:

"Now see here, fellers, we're in a scrape of course; but it won't do any good to give up like this, 'cause if we try to help ourselves things may turn out all right."

"If we can't get back in the Sally I don't see how we're going to help ourselves very much," and Harry made every effort to appear brave that Walter might be cheered.

"Some vessel will surely heave in sight before long, an' we can signal to her. The first thing is to find a flag an' set it half-mast, union-down. Any craft would try to find out what the matter was after seein' a thing like that, an' jes' as likely as not we'll be picked up before dark. Then we must get some of this canvas off of her so she can't sail so fast, an' when that's done matters won't be so very bad, for we can keep goin' straight ahead till we come out somewhere."

Jim spoke in such a matter-of-fact tone that the courage of his companions was revived at once.

They had not thought of the possibility that a vessel might be sighted; but now it seemed very probable, and the two boys set about the proposed task with hopeful hearts.

The wind continued to freshen, and in her limping way the Bonita worked slowly but surely seaward with a wide expanse of ocean before her, while the force on board was hardly sufficient to keep the helm steady in heavy weather.

CHAPTER III.

A SMALL CREW.

AS THEY searched for the flag-locker Jim did his best to keep hope alive in the hearts of his companions by talking as if it was impossible they could run many hours longer without meeting some craft from which assistance could be procured; but even as he spoke he knew it would not be strange if a week, or even more, elapsed before anything larger than a sea-bird's wing came within their range of vision. He had been in the Mary Walker on the fishing banks when it was known there were many vessels in the vicinity, and yet not a sail was seen for ten days. While the wind held in the same direction the Bonita would be too far north to sight any of the coastwise traders, and Jim was well aware that it might be a long while before they could summon aid.

The flag-locker was found after a short search, and when the stars and stripes were hoisted as a signal of distress the bright colors appeared to afford Harry and Walter no slight amount of relief.

"If a vessel comes within sight that must attract attention," Harry said hopefully. "I don't suppose any captain would pass us by without at least asking what was the matter."

"It would be a pretty mean sailor who wouldn't try to help us," Jim replied; and then, as the thought came that it might be many days before the flag would be seen by any one save themselves, he added in a voice which was far from steady, "Now let's try to hoist the Sally inboard. She'll be knocked to pieces if we tow her, an' there's no knowin' how soon she may be needed."

"Tell us what to do and we'll obey orders," Harry said cheerily. "I'm not sure but we can run this craft as well as a full crew could, so long as you know enough to be captain."

Jim was thoroughly well aware of his own ignorance; but no good could be gained by admitting such a fact, and he began to give commands in a very loud tone, as if the noise would drive away his dismal forebodings.

There was no lack of blocks which could be used, and by fastening a whip to the Sally's bow she was soon hauled in over the rail minus her cargo of water.

"If we stay here long enough we must calk the seams," Jim said as he wiped the perspiration from his face. "It won't be a hard job, an' we may need her pretty bad."

"Why not do it now?" Walter asked.

"Because we ought to get some of this canvas in before it blows any harder; but it would puzzle a better sailor than I am to know how it's to be done unless we leave everything loose."

Neither Harry nor Walter could give any advice.

and Jim was forced to work out the problem unaided.

"I'll tell you what it is," he said, after studying the matter in silence several moments. "It won't do to strip her entirely, for then we couldn't keep steerage-way on. The jib, foretopsail, and mainsail won't be more'n enough to steady her, and if the wind don't come any stronger, I reckon we can take care of the helm."

"Do you mean that we're to pull down them big pieces of canvas?" Walter asked in dismay.

"If I did mean that, it couldn't be done. By carrying the halyards to one of the winches, though, we can clew them up after awhile; but it'll be kinder hard work."

Then Jim set about the task which at first sight appeared to be impossible, and, incredible though it may seem, had before dark stripped the brig of all the canvas save what he proposed to keep her under while the weather remained fair. His slight knowledge of seamanship was sufficient to show him how work should be performed, and with the winch as a very material aid the huge squares of canvas were clewed up after rather a clumsy fashion.

When this had been done Jim went to the helm, which he lashed in one position when the task of shortening sail was first begun, and soon the Bonita was sailing properly dead before the wind, but in a lazy manner, as if sulking because deprived of so many of her white wings.

"That's a good job well over," he said with a

long-drawn sigh of relief. "Now, if it blows very hard, we can soon get rid of the mainsail and jib."

"Where are we heading for?" Harry asked, the severe labor having in a certain measure dulled the grief in his heart.

"I don't know—straight across the ocean I reckon," Jim replied; and then observing that his companions had noted the look of anxiety on his face, he added in a lighter tone, "It seems kinder funny that we three boys should be sailin' this craft like as if she was our own—don't it?"

"I wish we'd never seen her nor the Sally Walker," Walter cried passionately. "Nobody knows when we can get back, and our parents will think we meant to run away!"

"Now, don't get to feelin' bad ag'in," Jim said soothingly. "It won't do any good, an' you'll be jes' so much the worse off. We've got to have supper, an' who'll be cook?"

"I'll do what I can toward it; but I don't believe I'd know how to make even so much as a cup of tea," and Harry rose to his feet.

"Jes' bring up a lot of grub from the pantry; that'll be enough. To-morrow I'll show you how to steer, an' take a turn in the galley myself."

Harry beckoned Walter to follow him; for, if the truth must be told, he felt rather nervous about going into the cabin alone. Now that they were on the open ocean, at the mercy of wind and wave, the deserted saloon seemed peopled with things none the less horrible because unseen. Every inanimate ob-

ject had suddenly taken on a most sinister appearance; and the rusty sword on the floor seemed to bear witness of the tragedy which had caused a sound, well-found vessel to be abandoned in such haste.

Neither of the boys cared to look around the saloon in which the shadows of night were gathering. They walked swiftly through into the pantry, selected such articles of food as were nearest at hand, and then went on deck very quickly.

Jim had lashed the helm again and was in the maintop looking seaward in the vain hope of seeing a sail, and his apparent calmness, together with the warm breeze, the water sparkling under the rays of the setting sun, and the regular movement of the brig as she rose and fell on the swell, served to banish the fears caused by that desolate-looking cabin.

When twilight came, that time when homesickness always appears with redoubled violence, the three involuntary voyagers were eating a meal composed chiefly of delicacies, and Jim understood that his companions must be prevented from dwelling upon their own condition; therefore, as a means of cheering all hands, himself included, he proposed to spin a yarn in true sailor fashion.

From the number of so-called ghost stories which the crew of the Mary Walker were wont to relate during their leisure moments he chose the most horrible, and some time before it was concluded he understood that he had succeeded in banishing homesickness at the expense of an invitation to fear.

Even he himself began to be afraid because of his own "yarn," when it was told on the deck of a vessel so mysteriously abandoned as had been the Bonita, and the sighing of the night-wind through the rigging sounded very "ghostly" in his ears.

The three boys huddled close together, neither speaking above a whisper until after the moon rose, and then matters began to seem more cheerful. Jim changed the unpleasant current of thought by speculating upon the strange sights they might see if it was possible for them to keep the brig on the same course until they made land, and by ten o'clock all hands had so far gained the mastery over fear that the young captain proposed an arrangement for the night.

"We can't stay awake all the time," he said sagely, "so s'posin' you fellers go below an' turn in. If the wind dies out much more I'll lash the wheel an' join you; but if it don't one of you will have to spell me 'long toward mornin'."

"I don't care about going below," Walter replied in a half-whisper. "Why can't we sleep out here on deck?"

"There's nothin' to prevent it; but you'll be cold before mornin' if you don't get some blankets from the cabin."

Even Harry was timid about venturing into the saloon since that particularly horrible ghost story had been told; and very likely Jim understood this fact, for he said, after a brief pause:

"If you'll hold the wheel, Walter, an' Harry will come with me, I'll get the bedclothes."

This proposition was accepted, and a few moments later a mattress and half a dozen blankets were spread out on the deck aft, the whole forming such a bed as even less tired boys would not have despised.

There was yet sufficient food remaining from the supply brought for supper to serve as a lunch in case any of the party grew hungry before daylight; therefore, as Jim said, "they were pretty well fixed for the night." The wind was decreasing each moment, and, regardless of the possibility that it might spring up again from a different quarter, the helm was lashed amidships that all hands might sleep.

"I reckon some of us will wake up if it blows hard, an' considering that we don't know where we're goin', it can't make much difference whether anybody is at the wheel or not."

The young fisherman laid down as he ceased speaking, and his companions, in blissful ignorance of the possible danger to be incurred by this unseamanlike proceeding, seeing nothing rash or strange in thus leaving the brig to care for herself, followed the example of their commander.

The bed was hardly as soft as Harry and Walter had been accustomed to sleeping on, perhaps; but it was not uncomfortable, and in a few moments all three were in dreamland.

CHAPTER IV.

A VOICE FROM THE SEA.

THE SMALL crew of the Bonita were weary almost to the verge of exhaustion. Excitement and grief had fatigued them even more than the long pull in the Sally; therefore all three slept as soundly as if they had been snugly tucked-up in bed at home, and when the sun came from his bath in the sea they were yet unconscious that another day had dawned.

When Jim, who was the first to awaken, opened his eyes, he rose suddenly to a sitting posture with a misty idea that his slumbers had been disturbed by the sound of a human voice.

It was several seconds before he fully realized where he was; but the deserted deck of the brig and the Sally upturned on the main hatch soon brought back to his mind all the strange occurrences of the previous day, after which he began to speculate whether it was in a dream that he heard a low, feeble hail of "Brig ahoy!"

Harry and Walter were both asleep, consequently neither of them had spoken. Rising to his feet he gazed eagerly over the placid ocean, but without seeing the ardently-longed-for sail.

"I reckon I was dreaming," he said to himself, and then the thought of their lonely position drove everything else from his mind. "We must be out of the track of vessels or one would be in sight by this time; and when the next storm comes up it'll be good-by all hands, for we can't manage a craft like this in a gale. I ain't sure, but ——"

"Brig ahoy! ahoy!"

This time there was no mistake. It was a hail hardly more than a whisper, but yet so distinct as to prevent any possibility that it was a trick of the imagination. One would have said it came from the sea directly beneath the brig's stern, and Jim's face grew pale with fear as he looked quickly around without seeing so much as a floating timber.

"There's something wrong about this craft," he muttered. "Sailors don't run away from a sound vessel without a pretty good reason, an' I reckon she's haunted!"

"Brig ahoy! Help a dying man! Ahoy on board!"

The words were spoken more feebly than before, and Jim, thoroughly convinced he had heard something supernatural, awakened his companions by shaking them nervously.

"Get up quick!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "This brig has been hailed three times, an' there isn't even a fly in sight!"

Harry and Walter were on their feet in an instant gazing around in bewilderment; but seeing nothing, and after Jim had told his story, he asked in a voice trembling with fear:

"What shall we do? I'd rather take my chances on the Sally, even if we are out of sight of land, than stay here another minute. This brig has got ghosts aboard!"

"I don't hear anything," Harry said, the bright sun and sparkling water investing the vessel with a sense of life and animation directly at variance with any supposed supernatural visitations. "You're mistaken, Jim, that's all."

"Wait a little while," Jim replied, shaking his head gravely as if the subject was too serious to admit of any discussion.

The boys were destined to be skeptical but a few seconds longer. Before another moment had passed a low groan was heard as if coming from beneath their feet, and all three instinctively ran across the deck to the starboard rail, to put the greatest possible distance between themselves and the unearthly sound.

This short flight was the one thing needed to reveal the seeming mystery; for as Jim leaped into the main rigging with the intention of going aloft, if the ghostly voice was heard again, he involuntarily glanced downward.

"Look! Look there!" he cried excitedly, pointing toward the water; and, following with their eyes the direction indicated by his trembling hand, the boys saw a Whitehall-built boat about twenty feet long made fast to the main-chains. An oar lashed to one of the thwarts served as a mast, and fastened to this was a small piece of canvas.

All these details were not at first remarked, for in the bottom, lying face downward as if dead, was a man. His outstretched hands looked like claws, so tightly was the skin drawn over the bones, and even though covered with clothing it could be seen that his body was wasted almost to a skeleton.

Unaccustomed though Harry and Walter were to such sights, it was not necessary for Jim to explain that the occupant of the boat was a shipwrecked sailor in the last stages of starvation. The night had been calm, and he probably propelled his craft with oars after the wind died away, making her fast to the main-chains as he uttered the cry which awakened Jim, and ceasing his appeal for help only when consciousness deserted him.

It was several moments that the boys stood gazing at these mute evidences of agony without making any effort to relieve the sufferer, and then Harry asked:

"Can't we do something to help him? Perhaps instead of being dead he has only fainted."

"I ought to be kicked for standin' here like a fool!" Jim exclaimed as he clambered over the side, and an instant later he was lifting the man to a sitting posture, crying, meanwhile: "Bring some water quick!"

Walter ran into the cabin, all fear of the place having been banished by the desire to aid the sufferer, and in a few seconds passed a pitcher of water into the boat.

Jim was an awkward nurse; but his patient had

more vitality than was apparent at the first glance, and before the boy could bathe his face thoroughly he had revived sufficiently to grasp the pitcher with both hands, drinking most greedily.

"Don't let him have all he wants!" Harry cried. "I've heard that people who have been almost starved shouldn't have too much at a time."

Jim tried to wrest the pitcher from the man's desperate clutch, but he swallowed the liquid more eagerly, and the boy was forced to exert all his strength in order to accomplish his purpose.

"Wait a bit," he said as he held the vessel behind him. "You can drink till you bu'st, after a spell, but I reckon Harry's right about takin' too much just now."

The man looked fiercely at Jim for an instant as if about to spring upon him and thus obtain that which would quench his burning thirst, and then, controlling himself with an effort, he asked in a whisper:

"Where are the crew?"

"There ain't any on board. Us three boys are alone. Have you got strength enough to climb over the rail?"

Instead of answering the question the man attempted to rise to his feet, but his limbs refused to obey the will, and he sank back on the thwart as if about to relapse into unconsciousness again.

"Here, drink some more water," Jim cried quickly; and when the sufferer had swallowed half a dozen mouthfuls eagerly, he shouted to the others: "Lean over the rail and try to get hold of him!"

At the same moment he lifted the emaciated form—he had often raised heavier burdens—until those above could seize him under the arms, after which the remainder of the task was easy of accomplishment.

Harry and Walter carried the sailor to the mattress on the port side, lying him upon it tenderly; and while they were thus occupied, Jim climbed on deck once more, running directly to the pantry.

A case of canned soup was among the stores, and without waiting to select any particular kind he seized one of the tins and carried it to the galley.

To build so much of a fire as would be sufficient to heat the soup was but the work of a few moments, and then he carried a bowl full of the nourishing food aft, saying, as he handed it to the starving man:

"I don't reckon it'll do you any harm to eat this. I'll get a spoon, an' one of us fellers will feed you."

There was no necessity for any such preparation. The sailor still had strength enough to raise the bowl to his lips, and in the shortest possible space of time it had been drained of its contents.

"I s'pose you could pump two or three gallons into him before he'd know there was anything inside," Jim said in a low tone to Harry as the sufferer laid back on the pillows with closed eyes. "What'll we do? Give him some more?"

"Hold on a few minutes and see if he asks for it. I think he's going to sleep."

Jim went forward again, where he could be alone

while thinking over this addition to their number, and instead of finding relief in the coming of the stranger it seemed to him as if the matter had grown more complicated.

"It was tough enough for us before," he said as he went into the galley; "but what we're goin' to do with a sick man on our hands beats me."

He was not in so much despair as to forget that as yet they had not breakfasted, however, and he at once set about preparing a reasonably elaborate meal.

The wind was not sufficient to lift the narrow thread of blue which hung from the mast-head. The brig rose and fell on the lazy swell, swinging her bow from one point of the compass to another under the influence of ocean currents or eddies, and there was nothing to claim Jim's attention save the culinary duties he had thus voluntarily assumed.

Before breakfast was ready Harry came into the galley for more soup, explaining that the stranger had awakened and asked for food; and by the time the invalid was fed again Jim called his companions to partake of the result of his labors.

The boys talked of little else, while they were eating, save regarding the man who slumbered on the mattress aft. His coming had temporarily driven from their minds the sorrow caused by the enforced absence from home, and in this respect, at least, it was productive of good.

"There's one thing about it," Jim said, when the conversation was ended with the meal, and they had

failed to realize that the shipwrecked man might be of great assistance in the future, "his boat is a long ways ahead of the Sally, an' I wouldn't be afraid to sail anywhere in her. She ought to be hoisted inboard, an' if he's asleep now we'd better try to hook her on the davit-falls."

The man was asleep, and before washing the breakfast dishes Jim made preparations for securing the boat, which he rightly believed would be so valuable when the time came to abandon the Bonita.

This work was by no means easy of accomplishment, even though there was neither sea nor wind to interfere with the laborers; but it was finally finished successfully, and the young captain had no slight satisfaction in the thought that he and his crew were now well prepared for the worst.

It was two hours past noon before the rescued man awakened again, and Jim had more soup heated, this time allowing his patient to eat and drink all he wished.

"Go ahead," he said as he served the food aft, placing a number of dishes on the house, "for there's plenty aboard to fill up a man twice your size. Call on us for what you want an' I reckon we can find it."

The sailor was greatly refreshed by this third meal, and when it was concluded the ghastly look on his face had given place to what appeared very much like evidence of returning strength.

"Tell me how you boys happen to be on board here alone?" he asked; and Jim began at once to

relate their misadventures, which commenced with the cruise in the Sally.

"We don't feel very much like stayin' on this vessel, for of course there's something wrong about her or the crew wouldn't 'a' left everything behind!" he said in conclusion; "but we couldn't start away in the Sally, 'cause she leaks so bad. Now that we've got your boat, we can say good-by to the brig as soon as you're well."

"What's the use of abandonin' a good craft like this?"

"'Cause we can't manage her, an'—an'— Well, to tell the truth, I'm kinder afraid."

The stranger smiled as if he thought Jim's fears very foolish; but at the same time he could give no reasonable guess as to why the Bonita had been abandoned.

CHAPTER V.

BOB BRACE'S STORY.

AS A MATTER of course the boys were eager to hear the sailor's story; but no one asked any questions, believing he would relate the particulars of what was evidently a disaster when he had recovered his strength sufficiently to spin a lengthy yarn.

And in this they were not mistaken.

Before sunset he was able to sit up, and greatly to the satisfaction of his companions he volunteered the information they were so impatient to gain.

"Most likely you're wantin' to know how Bob Brace, able seaman, got pulled down to a reg'lar bag of bones like this?" he said toward the close of the afternoon while the boys were gathered around him.

"I reckon you've been wrecked," Jim replied, "an' we'd like to know about it, but don't want you to talk till you're feelin' all right."

"A sailorman picks up mighty quick after he's where he can get hold of a well-filled mess-kid, an' when its cabin grub that's poured inter him the rarity of the thing helps out amazin'. I reckon I'm the only one of the Trade Wind's crew that's alive. We sailed from New York for Cardiff five weeks

ago, an' had the best kind of weather for twenty days when a reg'lar nor'-easter struck us the afternoon of Thursday, nine days past as near as I can figger. There was time to get in the royals an' to'gallant sails before night; but the gale kept growin' worse so the spanker was downed, the main course hauled up an' furled, an' she was put fair before the wind, which had been workin' around to the east'ard. By the next mornin' we was snugged down with nothin' but the main-topsail, foresail an' fore-stays'l showin', an' the old hooker duffin' into it mighty hard.

"It looked as if she'd weather it all right till eight bells on Friday mornin', when every thread of canvas was blown off the spars, leavin' us wallowin' in a chop sea that stove the bulwarks an' swept the decks clean before we could heave her to on the port tack by settin' the lower main-tops'l. By this time the fo'castle was drownded out, an' all hands bunked in the cabin till Saturday, when there was no more watches below, for she was takin' water so fast that everybody up to the captain had to stand by the pump. We managed to keep the old barkey afloat till Sunday, when the long-boat an' yawl—the gig had been stove—were launched.

"There ain't much use to tell the rest, for it's like what you must 'a' heard many times. We in the yawl had six gallons of water, an' them in the long-boat had a bag of bread. Before we could divide the stores the bark went down, one of her spars striking the long-boat, an' we never saw a soul of

'em ag'in. I reckon pretty nigh every one was killed by the ruffle. The yawl held six, all told, an' I'm the last. The lack of food wasn't so bad till the water give out, an' then the weakest went first. Yesterday I threw the last body overboard, an' this mornin' after it fell calm your craft hove in sight.

"I didn't believe I could lift an oar; but it was life or death for sure, an' I managed to do it, losin' my head entirely after makin' fast to the main-chains an' not gettin' any answer to the hail. That's the whole of the story. It ain't very much in the tellin'; but, lads, the livin' of it was somethin' a man don't like to think about very long at a time. The question to be settled now is, where are we, an' what's the course to the nearest port? Did you find anything below that looked like a log-book?"

"We didn't hunt round in the cabin very much, but if it'll do any good we'll overhaul things now," Jim replied, the sense of companionship which had come when Bob Brace revived sufficiently to tell his story causing him to lose a certain portion of his fear at going below.

"The log-book would tell us where the brig was when the crew abandoned her, an' from that we might shape some kind of a course. Help me over to the wheel, an' I can manage to hold her steady while you boys are rummagin'."

The knowledge that immediate action was necessary to save their lives, as well as what might prove to be a valuable cargo, had a beneficial effect on Brace, and Harry fancied he could see him growing

stronger each moment. With but little aid he seated himself near the wheel, after which the boys went below to make a thorough search of the saloon and state-rooms.

The approach of night had already filled the cabin with gloom, and to dispel this Jim lighted the swinging lamps, thus giving to the interior a less sinister appearance. The sword still remained on the floor, however, and all felt that this reminder of what had possibly been a deadly encounter must be removed before the place could be divested of its horrors.

"It ain't anything but a piece of steel, no matter what's been done with it," Jim said by way of reassuring himself; and then, lifting the weapon very gingerly, he threw it under the berth in one of the state-rooms, closing and locking the door quickly, as if fearing that by some supernatural agency it might spring upon him.

This horror of an inanimate object may sound foolish when read in print with nothing in one's surroundings to inspire terror; but if the situation of these three boys be taken into consideration, together with the mystery attending the abandonment of the brig, very many excuses can be found for their superstitious fears.

The search was made thoroughly, but no log could be found. The slate, on which the brig's position had been partially worked out, was the only article which might have thrown any light on the matter, and this Bob Brace could not understand.

"You see I ain't much of a navigator at the best, an' this bit of figgerin' beats me," he said when the boys returned with the fruit of their labor. "If we can't get any idee of our true position we'll have to make a guess at it. How far do you reckon this 'ere brig has sailed since you come aboard?"

Jim frankly confessed that he was ignorant on that point. He described the position of the canvas when they found the Bonita, and the probable time she had been under shortened sail; but this was not very valuable information. The statement was hardly concluded when Bob interrupted him by asking angrily, as his gaze fell upon some object forward:

"Wasn't you in trouble enough when the brig carried you off but that it must be made worse by turnin' that hatch over?"

"We didn't do it," Harry replied quickly. "It was in that position when we came aboard."

"Then it's no wonder the crew took to the boats," and Bob wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his coat, apparently as much disturbed by this trifling matter as the boys had been at the sight of the sword.

"Why?" Jim asked, disturbed in no slight degree by the look of fear on the old sailor's face. "How can a little thing like that do any harm?"

"If you'd seen as much as I have you wouldn't call it a little thing," Bob replied in a solemn tone. "I had a messmate in the old Sea Queen what shipped on a English bark, an' the second day out

one of the green hands turned the main hatch bottom up. What happened? Why, in less'n a month the bark turned turtle on 'em, an' all but four went to Davy Jones' Locker. It's a bad sign, lads, an' one that I never knew to fail!"

"What is it a sign of?" Harry asked impatiently.

"Didn't I jes' tell you? It's a sign that this 'ere craft will turn bottom up afore reachin' port, an' we're in big luck to have the Trade Wind's yawl hangin' at the davits."

"Well, we'll fix that mighty sudden!" And Jim ran forward as he spoke; but the heavy hatch was more than he could lift unaided.

"It won't do any good to turn it now, for the mischief has been done," Bob said in a lugubrious tone; "but you boys had better go for'ard an' help him set it ship-shape."

Harry and Walter did as was suggested; but they did not move with alacrity, for the old sailor's superstitious fears had plunged them again into deepest despair.

"Don't act as if you'd lost your best friend," Jim said in a whisper when the two came forward. It's only a mess of sailor's nonsense."

"But he says the sign always comes true!" Walter replied mournfully.

"That don't make it so. If every fore-hatch what got turned upside down sunk a ship there wouldn't be many vessels afloat. He's all in a heap through bein' starved so long, an' most likely doesn't know more'n half of what he's talkin' about."

"The boys refused to be comforted. It was but natural that they should believe the eldest member of the party, and he an old sailor, rather than the youngest, more especially as the ominous prediction seemed to be in keeping with all that had happened since they boarded the brig.

It was a mournful-looking group which clustered around the wheel when the sun descended behind the waste of waters, for even Jim could not appear cheerful while his companions were so gloomy; and as the darkness settled down over brig and sea Bob repeated the story of his sufferings in the open boat, until the sighing of the light wind through the rigging sounded in their ears like the moaning of some unearthly visitant.

"What are you goin' to do about standin' watch?" Jim asked, in order to change the dismal current of thought.

"You and I'll have to take the most of it," replied Bob. "I don't know as we can do any better than keep her steady as she goes till some kind of a course is figgered out, for we ain't makin' much headway with this wind. I'll take Harry in my watch an' give you Walter; then if we should have luck enough to sight a craft, a flare can be started without the helmsman's leavin' the wheel. Hunt in the pantry for alcohol—you'll find some there; get a basin outer the galley, an' a bunch of oakum from the fo'castle. We'll have everything ready to signal, an' if a ship does heave in sight there won't be any time lost."

Jim didn't fancy searching through the deserted forecastle and cabin in the night; but it was necessary some one should set an example of courage to Harry and Walter, and he went below without a show of hesitation, returning a short time later with the materials Bob desired.

When the flare was arranged to the old sailor's satisfaction, he proposed that Jim should stand the first watch, and with a few words of advice relative to the method of using the signal, in case it should become necessary, he and Harry went below, leaving the other two sole occupants of the deck.

CHAPTER VI.

A CHANGE OF WEATHER.

WALTER could be of but little assistance on deck, owing to his ignorance of nautical matters; yet in Jim's estimation he formed, as companion to himself, a very important portion of the watch. Brave though the young fisherman tried to appear, nothing short of actually saving his own life would have tempted him to remain on the Bonita's quarter-deck alone in the night; and even with an assistant it seemed necessary for him to whistle very loud during several minutes after Bob and Harry disappeared in the cabin before he had sufficient control over his voice to hide the fear which came upon him.

Then he said in what was intended to be a cheery tone:

"Well, Walt, I reckon this is the last night we'll run dead before the wind, unless it blows in our favor. By mornin' Bob oughter be strong enough, if he keeps on eatin' same as he has to-day, to help work ship, an' then the brig'll be headed toward home."

Walter sighed deeply. Just at that moment he was thinking of the loved ones whom he knew must

be mourning his absence, and the word "home" caused such an uncomfortably big lump to rise in his throat that it was impossible to make any reply.

Perhaps the same syllable sent Jim's thoughts straying in a similar direction, for he began to whistle once more, and continued to do so until a voice from the companion-way asked, in a querulous tone:

"What's the matter? Short-handed as we are, do you think it's goin' to help out by havin' more wind!"

"It ain't blowin' any harder than it was when you went below," Jim replied in surprise, understanding by the tone of the voice that it was Bob Brace who had spoken.

"That's jes' why you wanter tie up the whistle. It'll bring a gale if you keep on much longer!"

Then the sound of footsteps told that the speaker had returned to the cabin, and Jim said, in a low tone, to Walter:

"Them old sailors are as full of whims as a dog is of fleas. Some of them on the Mary Walker had signs for everything a feller did; but I never saw any come true. Tom Downey, the mate, allers fussed when birds flew 'round the schooner, 'cause he said they'd bring on a gale, an' in a dead calm he'd either whistle or wish he had a cat to throw overboard."

"What for?"

"So's to bring a wind. He says it'll allers come when you do that; but of course its foolishness. Then again, if *I* happened to whistle, no matter how

calm it was, I'd get a rope's endin' 'cause they think a boy mustn't so much as squeak. If I'd believed Bob could hear me I'd know'd enough to hold my tongue."

"Did you get whipped very often on the Mary?" Walter asked, with a mild curiosity.

"More times than I've got fingers an' toes. Whenever any of 'em, from the captain down to the cook, wanted something to do they'd stir me up, an' it makes a feller dance when he gets a good stout heavin'-line across his back; but I'd be willin' to take a pretty big dose of it if I could be on board the old schooner just now."

There was no necessity for Walter to repeat this last sentiment. A severe punishment from his father at that moment would have been a positive pleasure. The lightest word in reference to home caused him to realize more keenly each hour the distance between those whom he loved and himself, and Jim's words seemed but the echo of his own thoughts.

During fully half an hour the two remained in silence at the wheel, steering the brig through the darkness on a course indicated only by the wind, and then the young fisherman was suddenly recalled from memories of the Mary Walker to the Bonita.

The breeze was increasing perceptibly, and the moisture in the atmosphere told that rain might be expected very soon. While the boys had given themselves up to reverie the clouds were gathering, until now it seemed as if they actually enveloped the brig as with an impenetrable vapor, and the

waters dashed against the bow with that peculiar sullen sighing which betokens a storm. The Bonita no longer sailed freely, but tossed and plunged like some living thing harassed by obstacles in its path until wearied with the constant strife.

Jim knew the meaning of this change in wind and wave, and he roused himself suddenly as does one who is rudely awakened.

"I reckon it would be better if we 'tended to our business instead of whinin' about what can't be helped," he said grimly, clutching yet more tightly the spokes of the wheel. "You'll have to go below an' tell Bob that a storm is comin' on, so's we can get in some more of this canvas, if he thinks we're carryin' too much."

Walter noted the change in his companion's voice rather than in the elements; but that was sufficient to cause him to move very quickly.

It became necessary to look in several of the tiny apartments before finding the two who were enjoying their watch below, after which it was an affair of only a few seconds to arouse them. Bob sprung to his feet before Walter had repeated Jim's words, and he awakened Harry by saying, as he pulled him from the bunk:

"Come on deck, lad; for we shall need the whole workin' force unless our fisherman has made a mistake!"

To have seen Bob ascend the companion-way ladder one would hardly have supposed he had been so near death a few hours previous. The necessity

for action seemed to call back all his strength, and on reaching the deck there was no evidence of weakness in his movements.

"Well, the wind you was callin' for has got here," he said to Jim, looking out into the darkness. "I never knew much good to come of boys whistlin' at sea, an' I don't reckon any one else ever did."

Jim had nothing to say. He didn't believe he was responsible for this sudden change in the weather; but long and sad experience had taught him how useless it would be to deny the imputation, and he asked meekly:

"Do you think we're goin' to have much of a storm?"

"It looks like it; but if we had half a crew aboard there wouldn't be any reason for touchin' a rope. The way we're fixed now makes things different, an' we'd better get her snugged down. I'll take the two boys for'ard, an' you ease her up a bit so we can furl the jib. Come on, lads; there ain't much time to waste."

Harry and Walter followed Bob without the slightest idea of what was required. They could carry out his instructions when he set the example, however, and in half an hour the Bonita was plunging heavily into the rapidly-rising sea with nothing save the foretop-sail drawing. She had no more canvas than might have been shown in the most furious gale; but, under the circumstances, it seemed to be all that was consistent with safety, for no one could say how much wind lurked behind the inky clouds.

"Now light the binnacle lamp, Jim, so's we'll have some idea of where we're headin', an' then try your hand at makin' tea. I reckon this will be an all-night job for me, an' as I don't feel so very chipper yet, somethin' warm won't do any harm."

Bob took the wheel as he spoke, and Jim obeyed orders, the other boys following him closely, for the stuffy galley was preferable to the deck, where the huge waves, roaring astern, appeared ever on the point of ingulfing the brig.

By the time a pot of tea had been steeped the storm was full upon them, causing the Bonita to pitch and toss in what Harry and Walter thought a most dangerous manner. Jim did not feel disturbed by it, however, for in his mind was the knowledge of that greater peril concerning which his companions were ignorant. The brig was dashing on literally at the mercy of the gale, and at any moment might strike a reef or the main-land, to the destruction of all on board as well as her own stout timbers, for the helmsman had no idea of what lay before them.

When Jim carried a pannikin of tea aft, leaving the other boys in the galley awaiting his return, Bob said in a low tone, as if fearing his words would be overheard:

"You must take the wheel awhile, lad, so I can hunt for the charts. It won't do to storm along like this without a little smatterin' of what's ahead, an' we'll make some kind of a guess as to where the brig was when you picked me up."

Jim grasped the spokes firmly, as much for the purpose of steadying himself against the vessel's furious plunging as to hold her before the wind, and after draining the pan of its bitter contents Bob Brace went into the cabin.

Owing to the violent motion of the brig the boys in the galley made no effort to join the young fisherman at the helm, and he was left alone during half an hour, when Bob returned.

"Did you find the charts?" Jim asked eagerly.

"Yes; an' I reckon there's no call to worry ourselves very much. We're runnin' pretty nigh south, an' if the brig was a hundred miles off the coast when I came aboard there's nothin' between us an' the Bahamas. We've got thirteen or fourteen hundred miles of clear water, an' this breeze will blow itself out before ——"

"Look! Look there!" Jim cried excitedly, heaving the wheel down to port as rapidly as he could handle the spokes.

Bob turned quickly, and but one brief glance was sufficient to cause him to spring to the helmsman's aid.

There was good reason why the two were alarmed. Directly in the Bonita's course, less than half a cable's length away, a huge fabric of canvas and cordage came out of the gloom like a phantom, as if bent on running down the brig.

The stranger had all lower sails set, and a collision would have been fatal to the smaller craft because her headway was so much less than that of the other.

"Up with the helm, lad, to meet her as she comes around!" Bob screamed, when the wheel had been jammed hard down for a second, and the Bonita heeled over while responding to the rudder's sudden swing. "We shall clear her, but it'll be a rub."

The stranger had also changed her course by this time, and as the two vessels swept past each other on a heaving, screaming sea of foam, hardly twenty feet apart, Jim sprang toward the flare.

"You can't bring her to now, lad," Bob shouted as the boy ran into the galley with the basin of alcohol-saturated oakum. "Even if they were willin', we couldn't wear ship."

Jim's excitement was so great that he did not hear the old sailor's words. When he emerged from the galley the spirit was sending up a blue flame which illumined the entire after-part of the brig; but the stranger had vanished in the gloom to starboard, and strain his eyes as he might it was impossible to see any answering signal.

"You needn't spend much time lookin' for that craft, lad. We've been nearer to her than we shall ever be again, an' you'd better chuck the basin overboard before your fingers get burned."

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED DANGER.

DURING the remainder of that night Bob Brace stood at the wheel, save now and then when Jim took his place that he might go into the galley to light his pipe or solace himself with a pannikin of tea.

When the young fisherman lighted the flare both Harry and Walter firmly believed that the ship which had almost run them down would heave to and offer assistance; therefore, as the Bonita plunged on through the dense gloom and over the howling waters without receiving any answer to the mute appeal for aid, their despair was intense. To have been so near those who might have given help seemed to make their position even more desolate than it was before, and after watching in vain for some show of a light from the stranger the boys gave way to grief.

"Now see here, fellers," Jim said gravely as he entered the galley and found them weeping, "feelin' bad won't help matters, an' it'll only make 'em worse. Bob says there wasn't a chance for them on the ship to lend us a hand, even if they wanted to, an' we must keep a stiff upper lip till the weather

clears a bit. By this time to-morrow there may be a full crew on board, an' the brig standin' up for the coast; so don't take on so hard. It won't be any use to stay on deck 'cause neither Bob nor me can turn in, so you'd better go below. I'll sing out if there's need for help."

Neither of the boys protested against following this advice. Both were perfectly willing to go where they could not witness the conflict of the elements, and when Jim went aft again they sought refuge in the cabin with but little heed to what a few hours previous had been a place peopled with phantoms of the imagination.

They were yet below when another day dawned, and Jim prepared an appetizing breakfast before awakening them.

The gale still continued in all its fury. With the single piece of canvas the Bonita plunged and rolled on her way southward, for the wind's direction had not changed by so much as half a point, and the watch on deck looked haggard and worn from the long vigil.

During the early hours of the morning, while the sun, through its cloudy veil, was trying to dispel the gloom of night, Jim asked if it was not possible to stand nearer the land in the hope of making some port, and Bob replied very decidedly in the negative.

"It can't be done, lad. The boys below wouldn't be of any account in makin' sail, an', besides, we'd stand a good show of plumpin' on the coast where

there wouldn't be the ghost of a chance to get ashore. We'll keep her as she goes till this wind blows itself out, an' then take to the boat if there's no craft in sight. This brig never'll reach port, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', and I'll be the first to say 'leave her' when the time comes."

On this day there was but little change in the condition of affairs. The gale held strong from the north, but no sail appeared within the anxious watchers' range of vision. Harry and Walter were eager to be of some assistance; but beyond taking a few lessons in steering there was nothing they could do, and their time was passed in comparative idleness.

Bob and Jim alternately stood watch and slept until, when night came again, they were in fair bodily condition for the work before them, and once more Harry and Walter retired to the cabin, knowing they ought to do a full share of the labor, but too ignorant to give any save the most trifling aid.

Before midnight the wind fined down to a light breeze, still holding from the north, however; and Bob said, with a sigh, as Jim made ready to stand his trick at the wheel:

"Ah, lad, if we only had a couple of good men aboard how quick the old hooker's head would be turned toward the coast."

"In case we don't sight a vessel why can't you put her about, anyhow?"

"We'll make a try to get the lower canvas on in the mornin'. You an' I must have a good bit of

help from the watch below, an' they'd be worse than wooden boys in the night."

This was not the only reason why Bob made no attempt to get sail on at once. He was yet feeble from the exposure and privations of the nine days in the Trade Wind's yawl, and although there was but little labor involved in such watches as had been kept since coming on board the Bonita, the anxiety prevented an immediate return of strength.

"I've heard of vessels comin' in mighty short-handed," Jim said thoughtfully, as if trying to bring forward some argument which might induce the old sailor to take greater risks. "There was a fishin' schooner from Newburyport what lost all her boats in a fog, an' the captain brought her home with nobody but the cook to help."

"I ain't a questionin' that, lad. The packet-ship Three Brothers, in the Chinese trade, anchored inside of Sandy Hook ten years ago, an' nobody aboard able to lift a hand but two men and the captain's wife—all the rest down with fever. I could spin yarns from now till daylight 'bout jes' sich cases; we're fixed different. None of us knows navigation, an' its got to be all dead reckonin', which is a pretty shaky way of runnin' even a fishin' schooner. Then, again, Harry an' Walter ain't strong enough to handle the wheel in any kind of a decent breeze, an' it's only you an' me. We must lay by till somethin' more'n a good fair chance comes, else we'll find ourselves in a bad scrape."

"Of course you're the one that knows what we

ought to do, an' I ain't sayin' a word if we run way down to South America; but it's kinder tough on the boys. I can see 'em, when they think I ain't lookin', wipin' their eyes an' actin' like as if it wouldn't take much to make both yell right out. If they didn't have no more of a home than I've got neither would bother 'bout how long the cruise is likely to last."

"I s'pose it does seem rough," Bob said reflectively; "but what's to be done? I reckon they'd rather loaf 'round here a good many days than take chances on a raft. Sailorizin' is a mighty risky thing for green hands, an' while I can hold my own among the best of 'em in the fo'castle, I'd make a poor fist of navigation. They'll have to grin an' bear it same's many a good man has done before 'em."

Jim had no reply to make. Even before the conversation was begun he realized the difficulty of reaching port unless under the most favorable circumstances; and now since Bob had spoken so freely he resolved to be patient, no matter how long they might remain at sea.

The old sailor, instead of going below, where there would be some trouble to awaken him in the event of a sudden emergency, laid down on the deck to leeward of the house, and a few seconds later his loud breathing told of unconsciousness.

To remain at the wheel, the only one of this small crew awake, and in a certain degree responsible for the safety of all, was a task from which even a more experienced sailor than Jim might be excused for

shrinking; but it was a matter which could not well be bettered, and the boy stood up to it bravely. Now and then the white crest of a wave in the distance caused him to start with joy, only to be correspondingly depressed a few seconds later as the true nature of the object was discovered; and thus amid alternate hope and despondency the two long hours of his watch were passed.

Then Bob took his trick at the wheel, Jim camping down on the deck in the place so lately vacated by the old sailor; and when his eyes were closed in slumber he did not open them again until the sun began to send long shafts of golden light across the leaping waters.

"What made you let me sleep so long?" he asked, with just a shade of irritation in his tone. "I was better able to stand watch than you, an' a couple of hours' sleep would a'-fixed me up all right."

"Well, lad, somehow the thinkin' of what might be the end o' this 'ere queer cruise kept me awake, an' when I wasn't sleepy there could be no reason for pullin' you out. We'll square it before dark, though. Now s'posen we get a little grub, call the watch below so's they can take a few lessons in steerin', an' be ready for settin' the canvas."

Jim, feeling that he was in a certain degree responsible for having thus unconsciously shirked his duty, carried out these instructions with the greatest alacrity. When Harry and Walter were awakened they went aft to their teacher in seamanship, while the amateur cook prepared a hearty breakfast,

which was served on the top of the house in order that all might eat at the same time.

Then Bob went below for what he called a "double dose of snoozin'." Walter set things to rights in the galley, and Harry steered while Jim stood beside him to make sure the Bonita was kept on the course, exercising as much care as if it was the only one which could be pursued with safety.

Although Bob had fully determined to turn the brig toward the coast on this day, there was no change in her course at noon, and for a very good reason. Before daylight the breeze had died away entirely, and at nine o'clock the Bonita was rising and falling on the glassy ocean with not air enough stirring to lift the narrow thread of blue bunting at the main-truck.

The involuntary crew had spread the yawl's sail from the house to the starboard rail as an awning, for the heat in the cabin was too great to admit of their remaining below, and under this all sought shelter from the sun's fervent rays.

Bob found a reasonably large stock of tobacco among the Bonita's stores, and with this and a short black pipe he occupied himself during the hours of enforced idleness, while the boys thought of home and the loved ones whom they might never see again. The seconds came and went until the sun was directly overhead, and the old sailor had but just settled down for a noonday nap when all four sprang to their feet in alarm, as the deafening crash of an explosion was heard.

The brig quivered from stem to stern as if from the effects of a torpedo beneath her keel, and the fore hatch was flung high in the air while a dense cloud of what appeared to be smoke arose from the hold.

Astonishment and fear rendered the younger members of the crew incapable either of speech or movement, and they might have remained staring stupidly forward an indefinite length of time if Bob had not shouted, excitedly:

"It's a case of fire, lads! Jump to it for what provisions an' water can be got out in a hurry! There's no time to be lost if we want to leave, for most likely the hold is one mass of flame."

These hurriedly-spoken commands aroused the boys from their stupefaction, and in an instant all three leaped toward the pantry. Each took what was nearest at hand, and in a very few moments there was a reasonably large but varied collection of canned provisions in the yawl. No water had been put on board for the very good reason that they could not find a breaker; and Jim shouted, after they had searched several moments in vain:

"We shall have to leave without anything to drink, for we can't get one of the scuttle-butts on the boat."

"I'll stand a pretty good scorchin' afore startin' like that," Bob said decidedly, "'cause you see I know what it is to be thirsty. Fill half a dozen of the fire-buckets while I hunt after bottles."

During all this time the smoke had been pouring

from the fore hatchway in dense clouds, apparently giving evidence of some mighty conflagration below; but before a supply of water could be put on the yawl it had fined down to a thin curl of vapor, and to this Jim called Bob's attention just as they were preparing to lower the boat.

"It looks as if somethin' had put the fire out," he said; and Bob replied, as he let go the davit-falls:

"Make fast there, lads, an' I'll take a look below. We don't want to abandon the brig while there's a chance of standin' by her."

The old sailor went forward, the boys remaining aft ready to lower away at a moment's notice, and in a few seconds, to the surprise of all, he was seen going below.

"Now, that's what I call queer!" Jim said after five minutes had passed and Bob did not make his appearance. "He couldn't stay down there very long if the fire amounted to much."

"Perhaps he's been suffocated and can't get back," Harry suggested in a low, tremulous tone.

This idea was sufficient to alarm the other boys, and stopping only long enough to make the falls fast they rushed forward, reaching the fore hatchway just as Bob began to ascend.

"Is the fire very big?" Jim asked; and the reply astonished them quite as much as had the explosion.

"There ain't even a spark!"

"Then what caused the smoke?"

"The brig is loaded with alcohol in casks made of red-oak. That kind of wood is porous, an' the

fumes escapin' have formed a gas that looked like smoke, but which had force enough to blow off a hatch that wasn't battened down." Then, as Bob seated himself on the combing and wiped the perspiration from his face, he added: "Now we can have a pretty good idee as to why this craft was abandoned. There was an explosion same as happened a few minutes ago, an' all hands thought what we did—that the brig was on fire. They hove her to an' got the boats over, most likely meanin' to lay at a safe distance until it was possible to find out what would happen. The mainsail was stowed, so she had no after-canvas to hold her steady. Then she got stern-way-on an' backed off till the wind filled her topsails, when she started like a rocket, leavin' the crew behind. Of course she would run a couple of miles, then come to, an' before the men could catch her she'd be off once more. The chances are that them maneuvers were kept up till night set in, when she was lost entirely."

The three boys listened with the utmost attention to this very plausible explanation of what had previously been such a deep mystery, and when Bob concluded there was a look of most intense relief on their faces. Up to this moment the brig herself terrified them because of what had possibly happened on board; but now all seemed changed, and she was suddenly transformed from something supernatural to the most innocent and peaceful of traders.

"Then there's no reason for abandoning her?" Harry said half-interrogatively.

"Not a bit of it, lad. We'll leave the hatch open to let the gas out, an' run her in on the coast if we don't speak a craft that can lend us two or three hands."

"S'posin' you could get some more sailors, then how would you fix it?" Jim asked, remembering what the old man had said regarding his ignorance of navigation.

"Take the chances of keepin' off the shore till we sighted a New York pilot-boat, an' then lay claim for a fat salvage."

"And we should be landed at home!" Walter exclaimed in delight. "We might stop in front of Harry's father's store, which is close by the wharves; and I guess there'd be a big time when Mr. Vandyne found out who had brought in the Bonita!"

"Don't count too much on anything like that, Walt," Harry added gravely. "Bob said he would try to make that port if he could find some sailors to help him; but according to the looks of things now it'll be a long while before such good luck comes."

"We can believe it will be here any moment, and then the nights won't seem so lonely, nor the days so long."

"That's right, lad; don't trouble trouble till trouble troubles you. Keep a stiff upper lip whatever happens, an' you'll stand a better show of pullin' through!" Bob cried in a cheery tone. "I was shipmate once with a chap what was allers worryin' 'bout findin' hisself on a haunted vessel.

He never'd put his mark to the articles till after he'd asked all about the craft, an' whether there was any ghosts aboard. Now, you let a man go nosin' 'round expectin' to see things, an' it happens that what he's huntin' for most allers comes, or else he conjures 'em up. Well, so it was with Tom—Tom Byard, he called hisself. He got drunk one night, an' the next mornin' awoke on a ship bound 'round the Horn with a cargo of railroad iron.

"It wasn't long before he commenced to hunt after ghosts, 'an this time he didn't have to look very far. I reckon the liquor—he'd been on a four days' spree—had considerable to do with his eyes; an' that very night, while they was within sight of Sandy Hook, he saw, or thought he did, the biggest kind of a ghost makin' right for him with a bloody knife. Tom was on the maint'gallant-yard with another chap when the thing come. He give a big yell, singing out that he knowed it would be there some time, an' over he went. Nobody ever saw hide or hair of him afterward, an' the captain put in the log-book as how it was delirium tre—tre—tremenjus, or somethin' like that, what killed him."

The point that Bob sought to make was forgotten owing to the length of the story, and even he himself appeared to have lost sight of any moral; therefore, what had been intended as a strong argument why people should not seek out trouble passed for nothing better than a very improbable yarn.

The boys were eager to see the cargo which had given them so much alarm, and had also possibly

been the cause of the brig's abandonment by her original crew; therefore they went below on a tour of investigation, which was not very satisfactory because there was nothing but a quantity of casks to be seen.

Ten minutes in the hot hold was sufficient to gratify their curiosity, and then the amateur cook sat about preparing the noonday meal.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER SIGNAL OF DISTRESS.

NOW THAT the boys had lost all fear of the Bonita, half their troubles seemed suddenly to have vanished. As a matter of course, Harry and Walter grieved because of the sorrow their unexplainable absence must have caused at home; but their distress of mind was lessened very materially by the belief that they would soon be in a condition to return.

Even Bob appeared to be relieved by what was evidently the solution of the mystery, and it was quite a jolly party which gathered in the saloon to partake of the dinner prepared by Jim.

"Now that things seem to be straightened up a bit, an' all hands are feelin' kinder nat'ral-like, I reckon we'll get some sail on the old hooker this afternoon," Bob said when the meal was finished and he had begun to make ready for the after-dinner smoke.

"There ain't wind enough to lift a pocket-handkerchief," Jim suggested, "so why do you want more canvas?"

"I don't reckon it'll hold calm a great while, an' we must be ready when the breeze does come.

There's time now to give Harry an' Walter a lesson in workin' ship, an' they need it."

The boys had no objection to make, for a certain amount of labor was necessary if they ever hoped to reach home again, and they signified their willingness to begin at once; but the old sailor insisted on finishing his smoke before doing anything else.

"There's plenty of time," he said lazily, "an' we'll lay under the awnin' till the sun gets a little nearer the water."

Then he arose from the table, and as the boys followed on deck they were electrified by hearing him shout, as he shaded his eyes from the glare and gazed southward:

"There's a steamer, lads! Now all we've got to do is hook on an' be towed into port. Set the flag so's they'll know we're in distress, an' we'll overhaul the hawsers to save time."

Before he ceased speaking the boys had made out that which caused Bob so much excitement. It was a small craft coming toward them under steam, as could be told from the thread of smoke which floated on the still air, and after one glance at her Jim hoisted the signal of distress while the others gathered in the bows to watch the welcome approach.

"It ain't a very big steamer," the young fisherman said as he rejoined his companions.

"Most likely she's a tug what's got blown out to sea," Bob replied as he went into the cabin for a glass; and when he came on deck again the boys waited impatiently to learn what could be seen.

During fully ten minutes the old sailor held the glass to his eyes, while a mystified expression came over his face as he said to Jim:

"Here, take this an' see what you can make out. It puzzles me, for a fact."

"She looks like a tug," the boy said, after gazing at the approaching craft several seconds; "but there's something queer on her bow."

"What about her spars?" Bob asked impatiently.

"She's got two short masts, and —— Why, what's that? She's flying a signal of distress!"

"That's about the size of it," Bob exclaimed as he brought his hand down on the rail with a vigorous slap as if to give emphasis to his words.

"I thought my eyes must be playin' me a trick, so that's why I asked you to look. Her bow has been stove, an' she's workin' up this way for help."

"Well," and Jim lowered the glass with a gesture of disappointment, "she's comin' to a pretty poor place, for we've got our hands full tryin' to help ourselves."

During the next half hour hardly a word was spoken, so occupied were all hands with watching the stranger, which approached very slowly, and at the end of that time she was almost within hailing distance.

It was a small tug with a flag run half-way up the stumpy mainmast, and her bow stove from the cut-water nearly to the pilot-house. A stream of water coming from the starboard side told that the steam-pump was necessary to keep her afloat; but

no person save a boy about eighteen years of age, who was at the wheel, could be seen.

"She must be pretty nigh as short-handed as we are," Bob said; and then came a hail.

"Brig ahoy!"

"Ahoy on the tug!"

"Can you send me some men? The steamer is sinking, and I am the only one on board."

"Who's running the engine?" Bob shouted.

"I am, and trying to steer at the same time."

"There's only one man an' three boys here. Can't you manage to come alongside?"

The helmsman waved his hand as if in reply and disappeared, when the steamer's speed was checked. Then he entered the pilot-house again, going below once more to stop the machinery entirely when within fifty yards of the brig.

By this means the tug was brought so near that a heaving-line could be thrown aboard, and ten minutes later she was lying alongside the Bonita as a tired, hungry-looking boy stepped over the brig's rail.

"I reckon you've been havin' a decently tough time," Bob said by way of starting the conversation.

"Since yesterday morning I've been trying to keep her afloat. If some craft hadn't hove in sight to-day I should have given up, and probably gone to the bottom with her."

"How did you get in such a mess?"

"An ocean steamer ran into us at sunrise yesterday. Before she could clear herself every one of

the tug's crew, except myself, climbed on board over the bow. I was the engineer, and had an assistant. He was on duty at the time, and I asleep in the after cabin. The shock of the collision threw me out of the bunk and stunned me, I reckon, for when I came on deck there was no craft in sight. Since then I've kept steam on so the pump would work, and run in the hope of sighting some craft."

"Where do you hail from?"

"Philadelphia. The Sea Bird is a new boat, and we were taking her to Cuba."

"How long have you been out?"

"Five days from the Capes."

"Then we've made more of a southin' than I reckoned on," Bob said half to himself, and seeing a look of inquiry on the stranger's face he gave a brief account of the Bonita from the time the boys came aboard; saying, in conclusion: "We're better off than you, for the brig is sound; so you'd best bring your traps over the rail an' let the steamer sink when she gets ready. I reckon with your help we can crawl in toward the main-land an' make a tidy bit of salvage at the same time. What's your name?"

"Joseph Taylor. The only work I have ever done on ship-board has been in the engine-room, and I'm afraid I sha'n't make much of a sailor."

"You've got strength an' pluck," Bob said approvingly, "an' that's enough."

"But I don't like to give up trying to save the Sea Bird. She isn't stove below the water-line, is new, and is worth fifteen thousand dollars."

"I'm afraid, lad, that we haven't got force enough to do very much in the way of ship-building;" and Bob shook his head gravely as if to say he thought it a hopeless case. "Howsomever, while there's no wind we sha'n't be wastin' time, so it won't do any harm to have a look at her."

Joe Taylor led the way over the rail, and the three boys, eager to see the little steamer, followed directly behind Bob, Jim whispering to his friends:

"If this cruise don't end pretty soon we shall have a reg'lar cripples' crew aboard. Here's me, who come from the Mary Walker; you, that never belonged to any craft; the old Bonita, with nobody to work her; Bob, as a remnant of the Trade Wind, an' now another feller with a sinkin' tug. It's a nice crowd to talk about salvage when they can't help theirselves!"

"Just let us get ashore once more, an' I'll be satisfied to have somebody else make money by taking these crafts into port!" and Walter leaped on to the deck of the tug in a discontented way, as if he fancied the shattered steamer had brought fresh trouble and complications upon them.

The litter of splintered timbers, loose ropes and general wreckage on the forward deck of the Sea Bird gave her the appearance of having suffered more injury than really was the case. Instead of a sharp, narrow bow, as is usual on crafts of her kind, the hull flared very decidedly from the water-line to the deck, thus giving her greater carrying capacity; and it was this upper portion which had been cut into, leaving the lower part in fair condition.

All this Bob saw at a glance after going on board, and he at once began a careful examination with a view to ascertaining how badly her seams had been strained.

"What amount of coal have you got?" he asked, coming on deck after spending fully half an hour in the hold.

"Enough to run three or four days."

"That wouldn't carry her to the Capes, if your reckonin' is right as to the time she's been out; but we might manage to make some nearer port," he said half to himself; and then added, in a louder tone: "I calculate the hole might be patched up with spare canvas an' plenty of tar; but we'd need fair weather till the job was done."

"If you could manage that part of it I can tow the brig, providing one of your party steers," said the engineer eagerly. "Why not tackle the job? If the weather should change it would be only the loss of a few hours' time."

Before committing himself to such a plan Bob made one more examination of the shattered timbers, looked again in the hold, and then, after lighting his pipe in the most deliberate manner, replied decidedly:

"We'll do the best we can, lad, pervidin' the balance of the Bonita's crew is agreeable; an' by patchin' the steamer up I reckon it'll be possible to pull the brig out of what looks like a bad mess."

He gazed inquiringly at the boys as he ceased speaking, and Harry, answering for the others as

well as himself, said in a reasonably cheerful tone:

"We'll do all we know how; and it won't be our fault if we don't succeed!"

But even as he spoke he doubted the wisdom of taking another burden on their already overloaded shoulders; and that this opinion was shared by Jim and Walter could be told from the expression of their faces.

Nevertheless, Bob's intentions were good. With the tug the brig could be towed in a calm, and her progress stayed entirely, or checked, during the hours of darkness when the danger of striking a reef would be greatest. An engineer and a helmsman was all the force needed by such an arrangement, and thus the voyage might be brought to a speedy conclusion without other aid.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HELMSMAN'S MISTAKE.

ALTHOUGH the three boys had agreed with Bob that an attempt be made to so far repair the tug that she might be gotten into port, all of them believed she should have been left to sink. By making Joe Taylor a member of the crew the brig could be worked under lower sails, and there was little doubt but that she would soon reach the coast; whereas, by trying to save the steamer both crafts might be lost.

The old sailor had already decided what should be done, and when the question was settled he went at once to the lazaret for such materials as would be needed. Joe Taylor disappeared in the Sea Bird's engine-room, and the boys were left standing by the rail, where they could discuss the matter privately.

"If we didn't have hands enough to work the brig I'd like to know how much better we're off by taking charge of another craft?" Walter asked disconsolately; and Jim replied, in what he intended should be a cheery tone:

"Bob knows what he's about. If the tug is kept afloat she can tow us in."

"Unless her coal gives out," Harry added; "and then we'll be worse off than before."

"We shall only have lost jes' so many days, for she can be abandoned at any time," Jim replied.

"And it is the possible loss of those days which makes me feel that we ought not to make any attempt at saving her. Walter's father and mine would be willing to pay what she cost if they could find us, and every hour makes their sorrow greater."

"Well," Jim said slowly, "it can't be helped, so we might as well look cheerful. Neither Bob nor the engineer would listen to us if we said the tug ought to be abandoned, and our only chance is to hurry up with the work."

"I don't see why Bob even thinks of such a thing." And Walter spoke in a tone of discontent. "Here we are so far from the coast that the tug was five days out at the time of the collision, which means ten for a sailing vessel, and with half enough coal to get her back. What good will it do to patch her up if we can't keep on steam?"

"That's somethin' I ain't able to answer," Jim replied gravely. "These old sailors are queer fish, an' nobody can ever tell what kind of a scheme they're likely to strike. This much is certain, though: Bob wouldn't listen to us, 'cause he thinks we don't know the meanin' of sich work."

"It seems to me that it would be better to abandon the brig, which we can't navigate, and go on the tug as far as her coal will carry us," Harry suggested; but to such an idea the young fisherman made the most decided objections.

"To leave a sound craft for one that's pretty nigh

knocked to pieces would be foolish. I'd rather take my chances ten days' sail from the coast on the brig than go aboard a steamer like her for a trip half the distance. We're pretty sure of keepin' afloat here, but on the tug, Davy Jones' Locker seems mighty near!"

By this time Bob had come on deck with a spare studding-sail, and the boys were prevented from holding any further discussion by the necessity of immediate action.

There was not so much as a breath of air stirring. The sea was like glass, save for the lazy swell which caused both crafts to rise and fall in regular measure, and everything seemed favorable for the proposed task.

"It ain't sich a big job, lads," the old sailor said, as, dropping the canvas on deck, he made his way toward the carpenter's-room. "I've seen crafts bunged up worse'n she is, an' yet finish the biggest end of a voyage."

When Bob had collected such tools as might be needed he summoned all hands, and the work was begun by spreading a double thickness of canvas over the shattered portion of the hull outside, fastening it down firmly with copper nails. This temporary stoppage of the leak was carried as far below the surface as was possible without diving, and when the aperture had been thus closed a heavy coat of tar was put on over the entire canvas. Outside of this, again, were nailed light boards which could easily be bent to conform with the curve of the hull, and then another coat of tar.

This portion of the work was hardly completed when night came, and the laborers rested only long enough to partake of a hearty meal, prepared by Jim, after which the old sailor said:

"We are pretty nigh through, lads, an' it stands us in hand to finish the job while this calm lasts. We've got to brace our canvas on the inside so it'll stand a heavy sea without givin' way, an' we can work below in the night as well as after sunrise."

The air was so still that the flame of a candle would hardly have flickered, and the motion of the sea had subsided until the two crafts rose and fell without so much chafing as would even rub the paint. There was no reason why all hands, save one to stand watch, should not work in the hold, for they could be of no assistance on deck; and leaving Harry as lookout in case a steamer should pass within hailing distance, the remainder of the party followed the old sailor.

By tearing out the bulk-head of the Bonita's forecastle Bob secured such timbers as were needed, and with every one working industriously the task was completed before midnight.

A sort of frame-work had been erected on the side where the timbers were stove, and directly against the canvas. As a matter of course it was impossible to fasten this except at the ends, and a heavy sea would soon wrench it off; therefore, braces running up from the keelson and down from the deck were put in to hold the whole in place.

This was by no means a substantial job, as even

the most inexperienced knew. In anything approaching stormy weather the tug would soon founder; but during such a "Dutchman's hurricane" as was now raging she would be as buoyant as when first launched.

That the water no longer made its way through the hull of the Sea Bird could be told from the fact that the siphon, which had been in constant use to keep the furnace from being flooded, now pumped her almost dry, and the old sailor announced as his belief that she was in fit condition to weather anything save a full gale.

"We won't lose much time gettin' under way," he added, after an inspection had been made. "How soon can you raise steam?"

"There's half a head now," the engineer replied, "and in ten minutes we can start."

"Very well. While you are lookin' after the engine we'll get the hawsers out. The tug must tow alongside, unless the sea gets too high; for seein's how Jim an' me have got to do all the steerin', we're obliged to work it so's to catch a cat-nap now and then."

Joe Taylor went into the engine-room, and before he had raised the necessary pressure two stout hawsers were made fast fore and aft, while more fenders were lowered to prevent chafing.

"Are you goin' south any further?" Jim asked when the work was completed.

"No; we'll haul around an' steer due west, now that it don't matter which direction the wind comes

from. Harry an' I'll take the first watch, so you an' Walt'd better turn in, for it's little sleep we'll get the balance of this cruise, even if we scoop in every spare minute."

Those comprising the watch below did not wait for this suggestion to be made a second time. The labor of the past fifteen hours had very nearly exhausted them, and their heads hardly touched the pillows before both were sleeping soundly.

By the arrangement Bob had made, Joe Taylor was the only one who could not be relieved from duty, and when the old sailor went to consult him as to how it would be possible to keep the tug running, he replied:

"We can fix that easily enough. I'll let you know when I can't keep my eyes open any longer, and then take cat-naps on one of the bunkers. If you ring the gong once every fifteen or twenty minutes I shall be awakened to see that everything is working properly. It's risky, I know; but under the circumstances there's nothing else that can be done."

Then he announced that there was a full head of steam, and Bob went into the pilot-house. The Bonita's helm had been lashed amidships, and, save in the event of very heavy weather, both crafts could readily be steered from the tug.

After explaining the bell signals to the old sailor Joe started the machinery, and for the time being all desire for slumber was driven from Harry's eyes by the pleasure of knowing that at last the brig was heading directly toward home.

Very likely Joe Taylor was affected in a similar manner, because, although having had no rest for many hours, he stood at his post during Bob's watch without intimating the need of sleep.

The weather could not have been more propitious than when what was hoped would prove to be the homeward cruise began. It is true the night was dark, even the stars being obscured by fleecy clouds; but not a breath of wind ruffled the waters, and the waves had sunk to rest.

The Sea Bird towed the heavily laden brig at the rate of six or seven knots an hour, and it seemed to Harry that nothing could prevent their sighting the mainland before the tug's coal was exhausted. He walked fore and aft on the brig's deck in order to keep awake; but during the entire watch his services were not required, and at three o'clock in the morning Bob shouted:

"Call Jim and Walt. We won't take too long stretches on this voyage, an' my eyes feel as if they were glued together."

The sleepers were awakened after some difficulty, and, when Jim went into the Sea Bird's pilot-house Bob gave him his orders as follows:

"Keep her as she heads, due west, an' have your eyes open for signs of land. I don't reckon there is any very near; but for all that we may be to the east'ard of the Bahamas, an' it would be pretty tough to bring up on them just now. The brig drags a bit an' that must be allowed for; but you'll soon get the hang of it."

Then the old sailor went into the Bonita's cabin, and Jim was left alone at the wheel, trying to drive away the slumber which still hung heavily on his eyelids.

Walter adopted Harry's plan for keeping awake; but the exertion was great and his body weary; therefore, in five minutes after the other watch had gone below he went into the pilot-house, stretching himself out on the cushioned locker as he said:

"I'm only going to rest myself a little, and won't go to sleep. It don't seem as if we were below ten—min—minutes—before ——"

The sentence was finished with what sounded suspiciously like a snore, and Jim made no effort to arouse him. He knew by his own condition how difficult it was to remain awake, and griping the spokes of the wheel more tightly to quicken the circulation of blood, he muttered:

"Let him take comfort if he can; there's really no need of both standing watch."

During the next ten minutes he alternately tried to peer through the dense gloom, and looked at the compass-card, which was faintly illumined by a tiny lamp. The throbbing of the engine, the long, waving lines which marked the faint swell, and the whispering of the night air lulled the senses, despite every effort to perform his duties faithfully, until, without being conscious of the fact, his eyes closed in slumber even while standing at the wheel.

In the engine-room Joe Taylor was battling against the same desire to which Jim had yielded.

He shoveled coal, raked the fires, polished portions of the machinery which already shone like silver, and performed other needless tasks in order to prevent sleep from overcoming him, but ignorant of the fact that both brig and tug were running wild.

The first hour of the watch passed, and yet the occupants of the pilot-house remained unconscious. Leaning over the wheel, with his head resting between the spokes, Jim heeded not the gray light in the sky which heralded the approach of day.

Had his eyes been open he would have seen through the rapidly-vanishing gloom a long, low, black line which half encircled the two crafts and told that they were running into a harbor or bay.

But he slept on, and each turn of the screw carried them nearer and nearer the dark mass until suddenly the brig staggered, rolled to starboard for an instant, when the tug came to a full stop with a crash and a quiver which sent the helmsman reeling backward against his companion as a rush and roar of steam from the engine-room told of a second disaster.

CHAPTER X.

AGROUND.

AS MAY BE imagined, Jim felt very wide awake when he staggered to his feet, after being thrown so violently against Walter that both rolled to the floor, and his first thought was that all the trouble had originated in the engine-room.

The escaping steam enveloped both brig and tug in a fog-like vapor so dense as to be almost stifling, and for several moments it was impossible to distinguish objects a dozen feet distant.

That the old sailor had gained the Bonita's deck with wonderful celerity could be told from the shouts of inquiry which he uttered in rapid succession; and before the first bewilderment, caused by the shock, had passed away, Jim was outside the pilot-house trying to answer the questions.

"Steamer ahoy! What's the matter?" Bob shouted.

"I don't know; but it seems as if the tug has exploded somewhere!"

"That can't be if she's still afloat," Bob cried testily, and from the sound of his voice Jim knew he was making his way toward the rail.

"I must have fallen asleep for a second, an' was

awakened by bein' knocked down," Jim said penitently.

At that instant a dark figure could be seen coming from the engine-room, and a faint voice cried:

"One of the boiler-tubes blew out when we struck the rock. Somebody must help draw the fires, for I'm burned pretty bad about the arms and face."

"Struck a rock?" Bob shouted fiercely, as he made his way toward Joe, who had retreated aft to free his lungs of the deadly vapor. "Are we aground, Jim?"

"Not that I know of," the young fisherman replied in a tone of bewilderment. "My eyes couldn't have been shut more'n a minute; an' there was nothin' in sight when I closed 'em."

"Get out the lead-line while I see if Joe is hurt very much."

The steam was yet pouring from the engine-room in such volumes as to prevent a view from either side, and Jim groped his way to the brig, Walter following close at his heels like one dazed. Master Libby remembered having seen the lead-line under the port rail forward, and but a short search was necessary to find it. Fully expecting they were yet in deep water, he reeled off twenty fathoms or more before casting, and to his surprise the greater portion remained on the rail instead of slipping through his fingers.

"Why, we're—we're on a shoal!" he stammered as he pulled in the cord until the weight could be felt. "There isn't much more than two fathoms out,"

"An' as the brig don't draw less'n fourteen or fifteen feet, we can can count on your havin' slept pretty nigh through the whole watch!" Bob said sharply.

Jim made no reply. He realized now that his eyes must have been closed many minutes instead of one, and was well aware that all which had happened was the result of his own carelessness.

"I'm in for it now," he whispered disconsolately to Walter. "Even if Bob don't use up a rope's end on my back I'll know that by goin' to sleep I've shut off our chances of gettin' home."

"I must be just as much to blame as you," Walter replied, in a trembling voice. "My business was to stand watch, and the very first thing I did was to go to sleep."

"But I had the helm, you see, an' oughter kept the sharpest lookout. I wish Bob would turn to an' give me the worst whalin' I ever got, 'cause it seems as if it might make me feel better."

"Can't we get the brig off somehow?" Walter asked with a sob.

"Seein's how the crew's so slim it don't seem very likely, an' everybody will say I cast 'em away when we was sure of gettin' home."

"They'll have to say the same of me," Walter added, as if this thought might give his companion some consolation. "Let's go an' have it out right away."

"With clasped hands the two boys walked aft, fully expecting to receive a terrible punishment for

their almost criminal carelessness; but no blows, however severe, could have caused as much pain as was already in their hearts.

Time was too precious just then for the old sailor to spend any with the authors of this last trouble, even had he been so disposed. Matters in the engine-room required immediate attention, and Joe was ready to venture amid the scalding vapor once more; therefore he followed, to render all possible assistance.

"Bend your head low, and keep this bit of waste over your mouth," the engineer said, thrusting a roll of cotton-threads in the sailor's hand as he went below.

The engine-room was filled with steam, to breathe which would be severe agony, if not death; but neither of the brave fellows faltered. By keeping their faces covered as much as possible they were able to continue on, groping their way amid what would have seemed like a dense fog but for the intense heat, while the roaring of steam as it escaped gave warning of further disaster if precautionary measures were much longer delayed.

Bob was unfamiliar with the interior of the tug; therefore it was necessary the engineer should lead the way, and after no slight trouble they succeeded in reaching the boiler from which the vapor was pouring in clouds.

The most important work was to draw the fires, and by following Joe's example Bob so far aided in this that five minutes later the glowing coals were

in the ash-pan or strewn on the cement flooring immediately in front of the furnace door.

Short though this time was, it seemed very long in such a place, and ten seconds after the task had been accomplished the two were leaning over the rail aft, drinking in long draughts of pure, cool air.

When they had recovered from the effects of the heat sufficiently to pay attention to their surroundings, it was possible to see where Jim's carelessness had brought the brig and tug. The steam had thinned down until it hardly obstructed their view, and at the same time day had been approaching so rapidly that near-by objects could be plainly distinguished.

The brig was on a level keel in the cove of a small island, or key, the low-lying land, which was covered with luxuriant vegetation, hardly more than three hundred yards distant in either direction. Had Jim tried to steer her into this sheltered spot he could not have done it more exactly; and the fact that she would lie there without thumping, except when the wind blew from the east, was the only bit of comfort Bob could extract from the situation.

The boys were on the Bonita's forecastle silently gazing at the odd foliage everywhere around, while Joe and the old sailor stood on the after deck of the tug, the latter saying, as he concluded a long survey of the scene:

"It might be worse, for a fact; but I reckon both crafts will be tied up here till we're sick of lookin' at mangrove trees."

"Where do you suppose we are?" Joe asked.

"This must be some part of the Bahamas. Look at the keys all around. There is but one other place anywhere near the spot we oughter be which shows up like it, an' that is the Florida reefs. We couldn't a' made them without sightin' Cuba or the Bahamas, consequently we must be further to the nor'ard."

"Should we be near any seaport?"

"Nassau is somewhere about; but it may be two or three hundred miles away, an' seein's how I can't take an observation, we wouldn't know whether it was north or south. Did you get burned very bad?"

"I thought so at first," Joe replied with a laugh; "but I guess it's only skin deep—more painful than serious."

"You got out of it luckily; how can the engine be patched up again?"

"If no more damage has been done than the blowing out of a tube I will soon have it in working order."

"We'll get something to eat, and then see what's to be done. Jim!" he added, raising his voice, "cook the best breakfast you know how, to make up for this mess you've brought us into."

Master Libby, who had been expecting a sound rating at the very least, because of his carelessness, was so thoroughly surprised at the friendly tone that he lost no time in obeying this order, and, as a partial atonement for his misdeeds, prepared a meal which in quantity and variety would have been sufficient for twenty hungry men.

The sorrow which all hands felt because of the disaster did not prevent them from doing full justice to the unskillfully prepared food, and the table had been relieved of a large portion of its burden before any attempt at conversation was made.

"While you're seein' how much damage has been done to the tug, me an' the boys will get an anchor out aft so's the brig can't work further inshore," Bob said to the engineer. "If you can get up steam, an' the tug's afloat, it oughtn't take very long to pull us off this sand-bank."

"So far as I know it's only a case of blowing out one of the tubes," Joe replied.

"Can it be fixed without much work?"

"Yes, by driving in a piece of soft wood to hold the steam; but of course it'll make no end of bother until it is repaired properly. For a job like pulling the Bonita off the mud a plug will be as serviceable as a new tube, which can't be had until we reach some port."

"Then you're to find out exactly what's needed, an' after the brig is in deep water agin we can lay here a day or two to get things ship-shape. Perhaps some craft will come in sight, an' we'll be able to find out just where we are."

"I'll let you know ——"

Joe stopped speaking suddenly as what sounded very like a human voice rang out on the still air, and in obedience to his gesture all listened intently until it was repeated.

"Brig ahoy! ahoy!"

Bob actually looked alarmed. He had believed the key to be uninhabited, and, knowing there was no craft in sight when they came below, all his superstitious fears were aroused by the cry. Just for an instant he hesitated, as if not daring to go on deck, and then ran up the companion-ladder, closely followed by the remainder of the party.

Surely there was nothing in that which met their gaze to cause alarm. On the shore stood three men, and when the old sailor made his appearance one of them repeated the hail.

"Ahoy on shore," he replied.

"Send a boat, will you? Our craft went away leaving us here, and we've been cooped up on this island nearly a week."

"It won't do much good for us to take you aboard. We're hard and fast aground."

"Somethin' to eat is what we're wantin' pretty bad," the man on shore cried; and Bob said, as he turned to Joe:

"I reckon we oughter go after 'em; but somehow I don't jes' believe his yarn."

"Why not?"

"'Cause there's no reason why an honest vessel would stop here long enough for her crew to go ashore; an' then, agin, they haven't got a sailor cut about 'em."

Having thus given words to his suspicions, Bob set about lowering the Trade Wind's yawl with as much alacrity as if some one in sore distress stood in need of their services, and five minutes later he and Joe were rowing ashore.

The strangers stepped into the boat the instant her bow grated on the sand with the air of persons who are conferring rather than receiving a favor, and making no attempt to push the craft into deep water.

"It's a sailor's rule for the last aboard to shove off," Bob said with just a shade of anger in his tone, and the man in the bow leaped ashore to perform that duty, after which the yawl was pulled toward the brig.

The three boys were standing at the rail forward watching all which occurred, but saying nothing until the boat was near enough to admit of their seeing the strangers clearly. Then Jim whispered:

"That's what I call a mighty hard-lookin' crowd, an' I don't wonder Bob says they haven't got the sailor cut. I wouldn't like to meet either one of 'em alone in the dark."

Two of the three strangers appeared to be Americans, but of a disagreeable type, while the third was unmistakably a Mexican; and it was this last upon whom Jim looked with the most suspicion.

There was no further opportunity for him to criticise them, however, since the boat was rapidly approaching the brig, and Bob had already shouted:

"Heave that gangway-ladder over, an' then set about gettin' up another breakfast."

The first order was quickly obeyed, and Jim went into the galley to comply with the second as the new-comers stepped on board and halted near the mainmast to gaze curiously around, as if taking a mental inventory of the brig's general condition.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STRANGERS.

THE NEW-COMERS were by no means prepossessing in appearance, and would hardly have inspired confidence even had their manners been more agreeable.

He who acted as spokesman for the party was a stout man with a very long body and short, bowed legs, that caused him to roll to and fro like a ship in a gale when he walked. It was his nose which attracted the most attention, for it was not only the most prominent feature of a not remarkably pleasing-looking countenance, but so enlarged and red at the end that one could well fancy he had fastened a boiled beet to his face as a partial disguise.

The other American was exactly the reverse in form and feature. He was tall and thin, with a sickly yellow complexion and a little snub nose which looked as if made of putty for a much smaller face—one that might have been bought at auction because it was cheap, if noses could ever be sold.

The Mexican would answer for a type of that class known as "greasers," save for the fact that he had discarded his national costume in favor of a dirty pair of duck trousers and a blue flannel shirt.

In the boys' eyes, at least, the three appeared more like hardened villains than honest sailors; and this opinion was strengthened rather than lessened when they were better known.

Although Bob doubted the story they told, he had no proof that it was false; therefore he treated them as if believing every word, and as the first move toward ministering to their alleged necessities had ordered Jim to prepare breakfast.

As a matter of fact, the account which these men gave of themselves was such as could not well be questioned in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

They were a portion of the crew of a turtling-schooner hailing from Nassau; so the red-nosed man had said during the short pull from the beach to the brig. Five days previous their craft put into this cove, and they, with two others, came ashore to search for turtles. At this work they followed around the shore of the key until so far away that night came on before the return journey could be made.

The other two men had traveled in an opposite direction, consequently they were alone, but not at all disquieted at being forced to remain over night on the island, because in their business such incidents were of frequent occurrence. With never a thought of trouble they made themselves comfortable in the thicket, returning to the cove as soon as possible after sunrise.

To their great surprise the schooner was no longer

there, nor could the other members of the crew be found. They had been deserted; but why, neither of the party could even so much as guess. The Bonita and the tug were the first crafts the men had seen, and, quite naturally, they lost no time in hailing the crew.

Jim was not an expert cook; therefore the work in the galley was done very slowly. It would have been nearly noon before the second meal could be served had not Harry and Walter assisted to the extent of making the table ready, and afterward carrying the food below.

Bob and Joe had gone about their task of ascertaining the exact condition of the brig in order to form plans for floating her, and Jim was forced to announce breakfast when his culinary labors were ended.

"You've been about it long enough to cook dinner for the President!" the man with the red nose said, in a surly tone. "If I was the skipper of this 'ere brig I'd find a way to make you more lively!"

"Well, so long as you ain't the skipper, but only a sailor what says he's starvin' to death, s'posin' you buckle down to the grub that's cooked, so's I can get the cabin cleaned up!" Jim replied saucily; and before the words were hardly out of his mouth he received a blow on the side of his head which sent him reeling against the rail.

Then, as if the uncalled-for punishment had been a kindly reward for services performed, the red-nosed man led the way below, followed by his companions,

who seemed to think that gentleman's method of treating their hosts was something very comical.

Jim was too much surprised to make any outcry. After looking around to learn if Bob had been a witness of the injury he retreated to the galley, soothing his anger by shaking his fist in the direction of the cabin.

"You jes' wait," he muttered, seating himself on an empty mess-kid where he could nurse his sore face. "You jes' wait an' see if I don't fix the whole crowd! Talk about bein' sailors an' then cuffin' the cook when you're goin' to eat aft! I'll bet not one of them villains knows how to reef a jib, an' before they leave this vessel I'll show what I can do."

It is not probable that Jim had any very clear idea as to what kind of punishment he would mete out to this man who had struck him without provocation; but he believed an opportunity of avenging his wrongs would present itself in the near future, and this thought had a wonderfully soothing effect.

Harry and Walter, as attendants upon the guests, were treated with no more consideration than that shown Jim. When the men seated themselves at the table, both boys went toward the companion-way as if to go on deck; but the thin man cried gruffly:

"Stay here, you young cubs! We may need somethin' more, an' in that case you're to bring it!"

Just for an instant Harry glanced at Walter, as if questioning whether they should obey, and then, evidently concluding discretion was the better part

of valor, he retreated to one corner of the cabin, where he would be ready to obey the commands of these strange guests.

During the next ten minutes the men ate voraciously—not as if they had been on the verge of starvation, but like pigs; and at the end of that time he with the red nose asked, as he rested both elbows on the table and picked his teeth with a fork:

"Where does this brig hail from?"

"I don't know," Walter replied, after waiting in vain for Harry to speak.

"Don't know? Haven't you got sense enough to tell where you come from?"

"*We* belong in New York. While we were at the Isle of Shoals, Jim and Harry and I rowed out to the brig, and found her abandoned. Then the wind sprung up and she ran away with us."

"Where did the old sailor come aboard?" the man asked, after exchanging glances with his companions.

Walter told him in the fewest possible words how Bob had become a member of the party, and also in what condition the Sea Bird was when Joe linked his fortunes with theirs.

"How happened it that you run ashore here?" the Mexican asked, and this question Harry answered.

"Then you've got no more right aboard this craft than we have," the first speaker said, "an' I reckon we'll stick by the ship. Do you know where there's any tobacco?"

"No, I haven't seen a piece except that which Bob has."

"Then hunt for some. In a well-found craft like this there's sure to be plenty."

"We don't know anything about it, and do not intend to look!" Harry said decidedly, as he retreated toward the companion-way, taking up his stand directly in front of Walter.

"I'll have to give you a lesson, the same's I did the other fellow!" the red-nosed man cried in an angry tone. "Are you goin' to obey orders?"

"I'm willing to do any necessary work, but I don't intend to wait upon you!" and Harry tried very hard to prevent his voice from trembling.

"That's jes' what you will do!" the man cried, as if beside himself with passion, and seizing a plate from the table he hurled it with better intent than aim directly at the boys, grasping another the instant the first had left his hands.

The second he did not throw, however. As the crockery was shivered into fragments against the companion-ladder, passing within an inch of Harry's head, Bob appeared at the hatchway.

"What's goin' on in here?" he asked sternly.

"Them boys were givin' us some of their impudence, an' I was showin' 'em the proper place aboard ship, that's all," the red-nosed man replied in a mild, friendly tone, as if he had simply been doing his host a favor.

"Look here, my friend," and it could be plainly seen that Bob was trying hard to control his temper.

"it won't be well for you to show any one on this craft what his place is. We took you aboard believin' you were sailors an' starvin'; but we'll set the whole lot adrift mighty quick if I see any more of this kind of work." Then turning to the boys, he added, "Go on deck or stay here, as you choose; but don't play servant to a single person on the brig."

"I allow you're lookin' at this matter wrong," the thin man said in a conciliatory tone, as Harry and Walter ascended the companion-ladder. "We haven't said or done anything out of the way. How was we to know but they was the reg'lar cabin-boys, an' when they insulted us jes' 'cause we'd lost our vessel an' luck was agin us, we only did what you would."

As a matter of course, Bob was not absolutely certain but that there might be some truth in the man's statement, although from what he knew of Harry and Walter it did not seem probable; therefore he said, with less show of anger:

"We'll let the matter drop; but you must understand that the boys are to be treated as I am. The one who acts as cook has been to sea a little, and can stand harder work than the others, who were never on board a vessel before. Neither of 'em are to be bossed or scolded, for all do what they can willingly, an' I'm standin' right by 'em. Now that you've had somethin' to eat, an' ain't sufferin', what do you propose doin'?"

"You're short-handed, even if you had only the brig to look after; so what's to hinder our workin' a

passage to sich port as you calculate on makin' ?" and the red-nosed man spoke very humbly.

"We reckon on leavin' the tug here," Bob replied gravely. "She's aground, an' what's worse, bunged up so bad that three weeks wouldn't be any too long for repairs. 'Cordin' to my figgerin' the brig can be floated reasonably easy; an' with Joe Taylor aboard I can run her to the main-land pretty nigh as quick as if we had more of a crew."

"Do you mean that you don't care about takin' us along ?" the slim man asked.

Bob hesitated an instant, hardly caring to say plainly that he had no desire for their company, and then he replied:

"It ain't wholly as I say. Considerin' what has been done, an' that the Sea Bird was disabled through the carelessness of one of my party, Joe has got as much interest here as I, an' he'd have to agree."

"Does he make any objection to helping us out of this hole if we're willing to do our full share of work ?" the Mexican asked.

"I don't say he does, 'cause, you see, we haven't made any talk about sich a plan."

"Then find out jes' what he's willin' to do;" and the thin man spoke very earnestly. "We'll agree to obey orders like as if we'd signed articles, an' before the brig reaches the coast you'll be mighty glad of our help."

"Do you know what island this is ?" Bob asked as if desiring to change the conversation.

"It's one of the Double-Breasted Keys," the thin man replied.

"On the Bahama Bank?"

"Yes; pretty nigh the northern point of the shoal."

"Then we're not more than three days' sail from Nassau?"

"About that; but you can't get in without a pilot, an' it ain't much further to some port in the United States.

To this Bob made no reply, but turned as if to leave the cabin when the Mexican stopped him by asking:

"Will you say whether we are to be given a passage, or must we go ashore to starve?"

"I'll talk the matter over with Joe. If he's agreed I won't say a word ag'in it, though I'd much rather take the brig in alone." And then Bob hurried up the companion-ladder, as if eager to escape from his guests.

When the three men were alone their entire bearing changed, and the one with a red nose said in a whisper, as he shook his fist threateningly in the direction Bob had vanished:

"We'll whine 'round only till the brig's afloat, an' then if we can't get away in her, leavin' that crowd behind, we deserve to stay!"

"And when we do have a craft of our own we'll pay off some old scores to that meddlin' fool who broke up our little game in Nassau!" the thin man added.

"It will be well if we do not show our hand too quickly," the Mexican said. "Without even so much as a revolver, we cannot hold possession in case they should decide to set us ashore."

"What a coward you are!" And he with the red nose spoke in a tone of contempt. "There are only two of them, for the boys don't count, an' marlin'-spikes or belayin'-pins comes as cheap to us as any one else. If we wanted to drive that crowd over the rail it wouldn't be very hard work, unless we two was the same chicken-hearted lubbers you are!"

The Mexican turned upon his heel as if the conversation was decidedly too personal; but he made no attempt to resent the insult, and the thin man said, in a soothing tone:

"You're talkin' sense now, pardner; but we need them fellers worse'n they do us. The brig must be afloat before anything is done."

"Of course she must. You don't think I'm sich a fool as not to think of them tricks. Leave me to boss the job, an' it won't be many hours till we have everything our own way."

Then the three men went on deck apparently the most honest sailors to be found on the sea; and from his place of refuge in the galley Jim watched them distrustfully.

CHAPTER XII.

SIGNS OF TROUBLE.

BOB WAS decidedly disturbed by this desire of the men to be taken from the key. If the story they told was true, he had every reason to expect from the first that such would be their request; and yet, now that he began to discern their true character, it was with considerable surprise he learned that they wished to link their fortunes with his, at least to the extent of leaving the island.

"I don't want sich as them around," he muttered as he left the cabin and went forward to where Joe was sitting in the shade of the jib with his chin in his hands, trying to devise some simple plan for pulling the brig into deep water.

"There's no way it can be done except by setting the sheet anchor thirty or forty fathoms toward the mouth of the harbor and working down to it by sheer expenditure of muscle."

"Never mind that just now," Bob replied gloomily, "for there's another question to be settled. What do you s'pose that crowd in the cabin want?"

"I reckon they're counting on our taking them away," Joe replied laughingly. "Most any fellow

who had been marooned on this key would like to leave."

"But I don't believe their yarn about bein' left behind, unless they were up to some mischief an' the captain didn't know what else to do with 'em."

"They ain't very pleasant-looking customers, for a fact; but yet they may be honest sailors."

"I don't take any stock in it, or they'd never carry sail as they do. The red-nosed fellow was heavin' plates at Harry when I went below, an' they tried to make me believe the boy had been givin' 'em impudence. Now they promise to do full work if we'll take them with us."

"And I reckon that's just about what you'll have to do, Bob. It would be cruel to leave them here; and, besides, we shall need the whole crowd before the Bonita can be floated. If I could repair the tug in any reasonable length of time, it would be another matter; but since that can't be done, on account of the damage to the steam-chest, there's a good deal of heavy work ahead."

"Then your advice is to tell 'em they can stay aboard," Bob said moodily.

"I don't see what else you can do, more especially since it might be awkward if they should conclude to remain whether we wanted them or not."

Bob was silent several moments, and then he said impatiently:

"I reckon you're right; but it goes mightily agin the grain to take sich cattle as them along. How-

somever, 'what can't be cured must be endured;' but I'll have my weather-eye liftin' all the time, so they'd better keep out of mischief. The sooner we get an anchor over the better, an' I'll call 'em, so's they can give us a sample of their work."

He was spared the labor of going below again, for just at that moment the three men came on deck, and at once made their way forward.

"I hope you ain't goin' to refuse us a chance to give you a lift," the red-nosed man said in a whining tone; and Bob replied, without so much as looking at his guests:

"Joe thinks we haven't got the right to say no; an', besides, we shall need a pretty big force to work the brig off the sand. S'posin' you take hold an' help us lay out an anchor astern?"

"All right! You boss the job an' we'll stand by for every pound of strength we've got."

Since there was no possibility of using the tug, it would be necessary to set about the task as Joe had said, and Bob explained to the apparently willing workers exactly how it was to be performed.

"We've got to lay out the sheet-anchor, backin' it if the holdin'-ground ain't good," he said, addressing his conversation to the strangers, but looking directly at Joe. "She plumped on here pretty strong, I'll allow; but it wasn't more'n half-tide when we struck, an' she oughter be worked off in two or three floods. One of you get the boat around, an' I reckon it won't take very long to make ready for the job."

The yawl was staunch enough to stand up under the weight of the stream-anchor, and while the Mexican was pulling her to the port bow, Bob rove a tackle on the yard-arm by which to raise the heavy mass of metal.

Seeing that some important work was in progress the three boys came to assist; but the old sailor quickly dispensed with their services.

"Stay aft, lads. There's force enough here for this job, an' by 'tendin' to the grub I reckon you'll be doin' your full share."

Neither of the boys objected to this plan. They had good reason to dislike the strangers, and were not desirous of coming in any closer contact with them than was absolutely necessary.

By the aid of the tackle the five men soon had the anchor in the boat with a manilla hawser, one end of which was made fast to the winch, coiled on top.

Then the red-nosed man and Bob pulled the yawl straight away from the brig's stern, while the Mexican hove the fakes overboard as the distance was widened. This portion of the task was slow and wearisome, for the weight of the hawser caused the boat to hang despite the vigorous efforts at the oars; but the desired position was finally gained, and after a great deal of tugging and straining the anchor was dropped.

Joe had two or three turns of the cable around the winch, and all hands began heaving on the bars until the stout rope was fairly taut, after which a

sloper was put to it, and the laborers sat down in the shade for a breathing spell.

The work was now completed until the tide should rise; and then, if the brig could not be pulled off, it would be necessary to break out some of the cargo in order to lighten her.

The most captious could have found no fault with the new members of the crew while this portion of the task was being performed. They pulled and hauled with a will, making no effort to shirk any particularly severe duty, and striving earnestly to finish the job in the least possible space of time.

When the heavy anchor was laid-out astern Joe congratulated himself on this addition to their number, and said to Bob, as they were stretched out on the deck while the strangers had gone toward the scuttle-butt:

"It seems as if our taking them aboard was a big piece of luck. I'll admit that they are not over and above pleasant-looking; but think of the difference in the work. With no one but the boys to help us, you and I would have been all day setting the anchor. Now we've got a good crew of five, and there's no question about our being able to sail the brig.

"You're right, Joe," Bob said thoughtfully; "an' I s'pose I'm a reg'lar old woman. The way they acted at first riled me so much that I couldn't see any good in 'em; but we'd be in a mighty tight place, now the tug is disabled, if they wasn't here."

Then the two discussed matters relative to haul-

ing the brig from her bed of sand, and gave no heed to the strangers, who were amidships conversing in low tones, as if fearful of being overheard.

Their consultation was evidently satisfactory to all concerned, for the red-nosed man said, as the question under discussion was brought to a close:

"She'll come away in a couple of tides at the longest. As near as I can make out she only hangs from the waist up, and if the anchor holds, five of us ought to yank her off without much trouble. We must be ready to carry out our plans at a moment's notice."

Then the men separated to walk about the after part of the brig in an apparently aimless manner; but all three met in the cabin a few moments later, much to the discomfort of Walter, who was clearing off the table and putting things to rights generally.

It seemed as if the strangers had not counted on finding any one below, for they looked at each other questioningly a moment, and then the thin man asked:

"Why don't you go into the galley, where you belong?"

"Because it's my turn to clear up the cabin," Walter replied as he continued his work. "Harry is washing the dishes and Jim's cooking dinner."

The boy had no fear of violence since Bob interrupted the scene at the breakfast-table; and, besides, he was engaged in necessary work; therefore after answering the question he paid no further attention to the men, save that he noticed the Mex-

ican walking to and fro, peeping into such of the state-rooms as were open.

"Well, you needn't stay any longer," the thin man said gruffly. "If you're goin' to live aboard ship the first thing to learn is that you've got no business aft, when any one else is here, except while waiting on the table."

"I can't go till the work is done," Walter replied innocently, as he continued the task with no change of manner save to move more quickly.

"What do you mean by answering in that manner?" the red-nosed man asked angrily as he seized the boy by the collar and dragged him toward the companion-way. "If you don't know your place it's time somebody gave you a few lessons."

Walter was both surprised and alarmed by this sudden attack. It had not occurred to him that he was doing anything wrong by remaining; but the grip on his neck was so strong, and seemingly vicious, that it was certain some terrible punishment would follow, and he screamed loudly for Harry.

Up to this moment it is hardly probable that the man had any idea of doing more than eject him from the cabin, because he did not wish to arouse Bob's anger again; but Walter's screams made him furious, and he boxed the boy's ears half a dozen times with no gentle force.

Matters were in this condition when the other boys came running aft, and one glance was sufficient to call forth all their anger.

"Hi! Bob!" Jim yelled, and Harry rushed boldly into the cabin as he cried:

"If you touch him again I'll knock you down!"

Having been summoned from his labors so suddenly, he had not stopped even to lay aside the coffee-pot he was cleaning, and this now served as a weapon. Raising it above his head he ran forward to strike Walter's assailant; but he had hardly taken half a dozen steps when a blow from the red-nosed man felled him senseless to the floor.

Quickly as all this happened, Bob answered Jim's shrill appeal before another move could be made, and Harry had but just fallen when the old sailor leaped below.

"What mischief are you scoundrels up to now?" he cried angrily as he assumed a position of defense after pulling Walter from the man's grasp. "It seems to me you're playin' a pretty high hand for sailors who have been saved from starvin'!"

"So far we've minded our own business and done all the work we could," he with the red nose said firmly; "but because you've helped us off the key there's no reason why we should take all the airs these cubs choose to put on. After you've heard their story an' cooled down a bit we'll talk with you, but not before!"

Then with a swagger which was probably intended as a show of dignity the man went on deck, followed by his companions, just as Joe came below to see if his services were required.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEFIANCE.

IT WAS some moments before the little party could discuss the apparently serious turn which affairs had taken, for Harry remained as he had fallen, and all their thoughts were centered on restoring him to consciousness.

A vigorous application of cold water soon had the desired effect, however, and in ten minutes after the self-invited guests went on deck he was apparently as well as ever, save for a big red lump under his left ear.

"Do you feel all right, now?" Bob asked as the boy recovered from the bewilderment caused by the blow and began hunting for the coffee-pot, which had rolled under one of the lockers.

"My ear aches pretty bad; but the rest of my body is sound enough, though it's hard to tell how long we fellers will be able to keep on our feet if those starving sailors stay aboard."

"They'll go ashore mighty quick if this kind of work is kept up. Tell us what you did that started 'em?"

"I don't know anything about it." And Harry rubbed his sore ear gently to soothe the pain. "Jim

and I came when Walter screamed, and saw the red-nosed fellow pounding him. I was going to take his part with the coffee-pot, but before there was time to strike a blow one of them knocked me down."

Then Walter gave a truthful account of all that had been said and done in the cabin, and Bob thought over the matter in silence several moments before speaking.

"It looks as if they wanted to know what there is below here," he finally said half to himself. "I mistrusted them from the minute they got into the yawl without takin' the trouble to shove her bow off, an' if I ain't mistaken there'll be mischief done before this 'ere brig reaches port!"

"I suppose they think we can't get along without them—which comes pretty near being a fact—and so feel at liberty to ride a high horse," Joe suggested.

"They shall soon know that we'll lay aground all summer rather than let sich a crowd of sharks bully us!" Bob cried angrily. "Come out with me, Joe, an' we'll settle this matter one way or the other mighty quick!"

"Keep your temper somewhere within soundings," the engineer said soothingly, "for they're three against two, and if it should come to a fight we might get worsted."

"If I ain't a match for three sich lubbers as them I'll soak my head in the harness-cask." And with this promise, which savored strongly of boasting,

the old sailor went on deck, Joe joining him as he walked forward.

The strangers were lounging near the forecastle, apparently indifferent to the disturbance which had been made in the cabin. When Bob came on deck they glanced toward him as if there was no cause for angry thoughts, and then resumed their conversation.

"Don't be hasty, now!" Joe whispered. "Talk the matter over calmly, to make sure Walter told the whole truth, and try to find out what they mean to do, before you threaten."

Bob shook his head as if the advice was distasteful; but he followed it, nevertheless. Advancing until he stood opposite the men, he asked in a tone which to make sound calm required considerable effort:

"Will you explain what caused the trouble in the cabin just now?"

"I told one of them cubs to get out—they've got no right below—an' he yelled blue murder when I took hold of his coat to make him obey orders. That brought one of the others, who tried to hit me with a coffee-pot," the red-nosed stranger said without hesitation. "That's about all there is to it. We did jes' as you or your friend would do when a boy aboard ship was impudent."

"Now see here," and it could be plainly perceived that Bob was struggling to keep his temper within bounds, "them lads are here by accident, an' two of 'em don't know what work is, yet they turn to like

little men. I consider that they've got the same rights on this craft as I have, an' the man who tries to make 'em obey foolish orders is bound to have considerable trouble with me!"

"There won't be any row if they stay in their place an' do a full share of the work," the red-nosed gentleman said very decidedly.

"It ain't for you to say what their place or work is!" and now Bob's temper was gaining the ascendancy.

"That's a matter of opinion," the man said in an offensive tone. "Me an' my mates reckon we've got jes' as much to say on this 'ere brig as you have. In the first place she was abandoned by her proper crew; the cubs were carried off in her, an' you jes' the same as drifted aboard. All you've done toward savin' her has been to run on this shoal. The tug's rightful engineer is in charge, so we've got nothin' to say about her; but we're calculatin' on stickin' to what's as much ours as yours!"

If Bob had been alone it is most probable he would have struck the speaker, and thus precipitated a fight, which very likely was just what the strangers desired; but Joe held him back as he said, in a low tone:

"Keep your temper, old man; this is no time for a row. Wait awhile."

"I'll soon show how much right I've got here!" he cried angrily, struggling to release himself from Joe's detaining grasp, and paying no attention to the wise advice.

"You couldn't do better than begin now," the red-nosed man said sneeringly as he and his companions put themselves in an attitude of defence. "Talk is cheap when a man hasn't got the nerve to back it up!"

"Have some sense about you," Joe whispered angrily. "Can't you see that a row is just what they want?"

Fortunately for all save the strangers, Bob realized the truth of this remark, and instead of rushing blindly forward to what would have been certain defeat, he stepped back a few paces to the foremast where he could reach a belaying-pin in case weapons became necessary, and Joe continued the conversation by saying:

"This talk about your rights is all bosh. I was in charge of the tug, and picked up this vessel, towing her in here. Any court would recognize my claim as a just one. You wouldn't have a leg to stand on if it came to legal rights, for both crafts had a crew on board, and nobody asked for assistance. We propose to hold our ground, and before proceeding to extremities allow you ten minutes in which to leave this brig. If you go peaceably we will give you one of the Sea Bird's boats and a reasonable supply of provisions; but in case force is necessary, it may be a matter of swimming ashore!"

"A reg'lar sea-lawyer, eh?" the red-nosed man said with a contemptuous laugh, in which his companions joined. "We've told you our ideas on the subject, an' if so be that they don't jes' agree with

yours, then I s'pose we'll have to be put ashore—providin' it can be done without too much harm to them as tackles the job!"

This speech afforded the strangers no slight amount of amusement, and as they laughed boisterously Bob seized a belaying-pin with the evident intention of deciding the question at once.

"Be careful," Joe whispered. "Can't you see that they've got the capstan-bars ready for use? We should be knocked over like nine-pins before it would be possible to strike a blow. There may be some fire-arms aft, and if we get hold of them first all the advantage will be on our side."

Bob had turned to follow the very sensible advice when the red-nosed man shouted, this time in a threatening tone:

"Seein's how you've laid down the law for us, I reckon we'd better give you a dose. I don't say you've got to go ashore whether or no, for it's our way to let everybody have a chance. If you're willin' to say that we're on the same footin' as you, share an' share alike, there'll be no trouble. In case you don't look at it in that light, then somebody must take to the island; but it won't be any of us!"

"Don't answer him," Joe said, as he literally pushed Bob aft. "They reckon on settlin' matters by a fight now, when they've got the best of it, an' we must be careful not to do anything foolish."

The old sailor walked swiftly away, as if fearing to trust himself too long within sound of that mocking voice, and Joe kept close behind him until they

were in the cabin, where the boys had remained until the result of the revolt should be determined.

"Sit in the companion-way where you can keep your eye on those men, and sing out if they make any move toward coming aft," Joe said to Jim; and the latter obeyed at once by taking up his position where everything forward of the mainmast came within his range of vision.

Bob's rage was so great that his only desire just now was to enforce authority, and he lost no time before beginning the search for weapons. From one state-room to another he went, looking into sea-chests, overhauling boxes, and upsetting drawers; but nothing more deadly than a sail-needle met his eager gaze. As a matter of course, there must have been fire-arms on board the brig when she left port; but those who abandoned her had taken everything of the kind with them.

"I can't find so much as a sheath-knife," he said, coming into the saloon where Joe stood revolving this very serious turn of affairs in his mind. "We shall have to trust our fists and anything in the way of a club that can be picked up, for I'm not goin' to let another hour go by without showin' them villains that we intend to hold possession of this craft."

"But we mustn't act until we've formed some plan," Joe replied. "Tell me just what you propose doing, and I'll stand by till the last."

"I'm going to drive them over the side!" Bob cried, passionately.

"Just now they are stronger than our crowd, and it may be a question as to who goes first."

Joe spoke in a matter-of-fact tone; but it could be seen that he was laboring under no less excitement than the sailor; and the latter, beginning to realize the weakness of their position, asked hoarsely:

"What do you think we ought to do?"

"Wait awhile till we see how they're going to act;" and then the engineer ascended the companion-ladder to ascertain the condition of affairs forward.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BARGAIN.

IT SURELY seemed as if those who had been carried away by the Bonita were to have their cup of trouble filled to the brim. Running ashore on a pleasant night when there was every reason to believe they were near a home port was looked upon as a great disaster at the time; but now it dwindled into a trifle before the dangers which menaced.

There could no longer be a question but that the strangers were ripe for any mischief, even at the expense of a drawn battle, and Joe was inclined to believe they might vanquish his party.

"They're hard tickets, and were most likely marooned here because of their misdeeds," he muttered to himself as he lounged on deck to ascertain if the enemy had made any change of position. "It'll take some mighty neat work to get us out of this scrape, for we can't risk a fight, and it's a question whether Bob can be held in check."

The men yet remained forward, where, in the shadow of the forecastle, they could have the benefit of the light land breeze, and were apparently indifferent as to what move the rightful crew of the brig might make.

Joe stood on the quarter-deck nearly half an hour trying in vain to decide upon some plan which would at least promise success, and then he went below, looking, as in fact he felt, his lack of hope in the final result.

"It's pretty near high water," he said to Bob, who was making one more search of the cabin with the idea that it might yet be possible to find weapons, "and the question is, are we going to lose this tide without making an effort to launch the brig?"

"What can we do?" the old sailor asked impatiently. "It don't stand to reason that them villains would be any more decent if she was afloat than they are now!"

"And before many days there'll come an easterly wind which will drive her up on the sand beyond all chance of ever being launched again!"

"That's jes' what is makin' me almost wild!" Bob cried as he turned and faced the engineer. "She oughter be floated between now an' to-morrow night; but it can't be done!"

"Why not?" Joe asked calmly. "I've been turning matters over in my mind, and don't see the slightest chance of ever being able to drive those men ashore. Wouldn't it be better to join forces rather than lose the brig entirely and be dependent upon sighting some vessel to take us off the key?"

The old sailor looked up as if astonished that such a proposition should be made; but before the angry reply, which was trembling on his lips, could be spoken, Joe said gently:

"Think the whole matter over before you say anything, and take plenty of time, for we don't want to make another mistake."

Bob looked at the speaker angrily for a moment, and then seating himself at the table with his head in his hands, he remained silent so long that the boys, who were watching him intently, believed he had fallen asleep.

"What's your plan?" he finally asked.

"It isn't what can be called a plan, but, according to my way of thinking, the only course left for us to pursue. We've *got* to make some kind of a trade with those villains in order to get away from this place, and the sooner it's done the better."

"Go out an' see what they'll agree to!" Bob said hoarsely. "I'll stand by any bargain you think half-fair."

Joe did not wait for further conversation. He was eager to take advantage of the tide, and no time was to be lost.

"Look here, Jim," the old sailor said, when the engineer had left the cabin, "if Joe makes a trade with them scoundrels, as I reckon he will, something must be done to prevent you boys from bein' kicked 'round, for we can't have a fight every hour. While the brig is aground you'd best stay on board the tug, so's to be out of the way. When the grub is ready shove it on the table, an' then all three clear out, leavin' us to wait on ourselves. That'll ease things up a little."

While Bob was thus planning to save the boys

from brutal treatment, Joe had lost no time in finishing his very disagreeable task.

When he went forward the men did not pay the slightest attention to his movements, but continued their conversation as if whatever he might do was no concern of theirs. It was not until he halted directly in front of the party that the red-nosed man so much as raised his eyes.

"See here," Joe began, as if to speak was distasteful; "we've got to come to some agreement, for splitting-up now, when the brig's aground, isn't much better than child's play."

"That's my idee, to a dot!" he of the red nose replied with a leer; "but it ain't us what's makin' the row! We've got rights, no matter if you did bring us aboard; an' what's more, we're goin' to have 'em!"

"We won't discuss that part of it," Joe said curtly. "You know as well as I do that if there'd been two or three more in our party you wouldn't have said a word about rights; but since it's your intention to take unfair advantage of those who tried to relieve suffering, we'll let the matter drop. None of us will gain anything if the brig goes to pieces, and it's for the interest of all hands to have her launched; therefore I've come to make a bargain."

"Well, out with it!" the man said coarsely, as Joe ceased speaking.

"I propose that we turn to, as if nothing had happened, each one swearing to do his utmost to-

ward carrying the brig to the nearest American port, and there the whole matter can, as indeed it must, be submitted to the court for settlement. On your part you agree not to molest the boys in any way, and they are to do nothing but the cooking. We will recognize what I think are your unjust claims until the case is legally settled. No property is to be taken from the vessel, and, so far as possible, everything must remain as we found it."

"An' it has taken you all this time to fix up that agreement, eh?" the man asked, with a boisterous laugh. "I don't see but it amounts to jes' what we wanted at first. Look here, Mister Engineer, you an' Bob have got an idee that we ain't on the square, an' it's a big mistake. When we found you needed our help to work the brig into port, an' couldn't do it alone, we said it was only fair play for us to share in whatever salvage might be made. Now we'll agree to your bargain, 'cause it's nothin' more nor less than what I proposed, an' the sooner we get to work on that hawser the better, 'cause it's about flood-tide."

Joe realized this fact fully, and he went quickly aft for Bob, explaining to him in the fewest possible words the result of his interview.

"I hate to knuckle down to them scoundrels; but I s'pose it can't be helped," the old sailor said as he arose to his feet. "Keep out of the way, boys, so there won't be any chance for more abuse."

To have seen the party five minutes after Bob went forward, one would not fancy there had been

any hard feelings among them. The strangers set about the work with a will, recognizing the old sailor as being in command, and with apparently no other thought than such as was for the benefit of all.

The tide had ceased rising, it being that time known as "slack water," when the capstan-bars were brought into use, and every member of the party exerted all his strength in the effort.

Once, twice, three times the men leaped against the stout bars without making any perceptible change in the brig's position, and Joe began to fancy it would have been as well if he had not humbled himself by making a trade with the strangers.

"Buckle down to it once more," Bob shouted. "It lacked almost an hour of bein' high water when she struck, an' there can't be so very much sand under her bow. Break down once more!"

No one hung back. The red-nosed man appeared to have the strength of a giant, and as he hove at the handles it seemed as if the wood or iron must surely give way under the enormous strain."

"Grind her down!" he yelled, and when one more determined effort had been made there was a decided movement. The bars were started fully a quarter of a turn, and Bob shouted:

"Now's the time, my hearties! Heave around once, an' we're clear of this blessed key!"

Then every man hove down on the bars as the Mexican held turn, and inch by inch the heavy hawser came inboard until the winch revolved readily as the Bonita glided out into deeper water,

until she lay clear of the shoal, swinging to the grip of the cable over her stern.

"Hurrah!" Bob shouted, and the others joined in the cheers, causing the boys to come from the galley to learn the reason for such an uproar.

"It's a matter of gettin' that anchor home, an' then when the wind springs up ag'in we can leave this sand-heap behind us," the red-nosed man said in a tone of satisfaction, as he wiped the perspiration from his face before following the example of the others, who had flung themselves at full length in the shadow of the forecastle.

"What about the Sea Bird, Bob?" Joe asked when he had regained his breath sufficiently to talk. "I hate to leave the little craft to the mercy of wind and wave."

"Why don't you swing this hawser right aboard of her?" the red-nosed man proposed. "The owners may think she's worth comin' after, an' she'll lay here comfortable enough, unless it blows a full gale from the east."

The tug was still made fast to the brig, having came off the shoal at the same time, and, save for the huge patch of canvas over her bow, looking as staunch as when first launched.

"That's just what we will do; an' it'll save heavin' up the heavy anchor!" Joe cried. "The Bonita can lay alongside as well as if she was moored, and it won't take us so long to get under way when the wind does come."

As soon as the party had recovered somewhat

from the fatigue of straining at the winch, the hawser was shifted to the forward bitt on the Sea Bird, and both crafts gradually swung around until they were headed for the open sea.

"We'll have a breeze before morning," the thin man remarked, "for one has sprung up every night since we landed, an' it's safe to calculate on leavin' about midnight."

"After we've had somethin' to eat we'll make ready for it," Bob said as he went toward the galley, for it was fully an hour past noon and the appetites of all were decidedly sharpened.

The amateur cook had everything ready, and the three boys carried the food below without being molested by those whom they quite naturally looked upon as enemies.

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNWARRANTED SEARCH.

BOB GAVE an expressive look to the boys when the repast had been placed on the table, and all three understood that he meant for them to leave the cabin rather than run any chance of another encounter with the men.

A quarrel just now, however trivial the cause, might lead to very serious consequences, because the guests were unscrupulous and stronger than the Bonita's crew; therefore this precaution of the old sailor's was a wise one. Jim and Harry not only realized the fact, but they were more than eager to be beyond the reach of these quarrelsome strangers, whose blows were bestowed without provocation, and they went into the galley, closely followed by Walter.

"I've sailed along of some pretty tough customers," Jim said with the air of one who has had many and varied experiences, as he seated himself on an empty keg just outside the galley door, "but I never run across anybody like them duffers. They're worse'n old Mose Pearson, an' folks used to say he was the ugliest skipper that ever hove a mackerel-line."

"They act as if the brig belonged to them, and we were the ones who had been taken off the key," Harry said bitterly. "I wish Bob never'd allowed them aboard!"

"So do I!" And Jim spoke very emphatically. "There'll be a heap of trouble before we get rid of that crowd, or else I don't know anything about sich fellers. If they put on many more airs us three will have to sleep aboard of the tug, where we won't run the risk of bein' knocked down."

"We can stand a good deal if they help us get the brig into port," Walter said with a sigh. "I'm willing to be thumped every day for a week if I can get home once more."

"Most any of us would;" and Jim again put on his air of exceeding wisdom; "but the trouble is we can't count on goin' where we want to while they are aboard. I wouldn't be much 'stonished to hear that red-nosed man order all hands, 'cept his own crowd, ashore any minute. I'll be satisfied if, when the next fight comes, Bob hits him one crack hard enough to send more'n a thousand stars dancin' before his eyes. A good thump is the only thing that'll make him walk straight!"

The others would have been equally delighted at such a lesson; but there was not time to say so, for just at this moment Joe called for coffee, and Harry ran below with a fresh supply, after which the boys set about cleaning up the galley preparatory to getting their own dinner.

In the cabin, matters were progressing so favor-

ably that a stranger would hardly have supposed the party had been upon the verge of an open rupture but a few hours previous. The thin man was particularly affable, and seemed to be thinking of no other subject save that of sailing the brig to the nearest American port in the shortest space of time.

"If you're no navigator, how do you calculate it'll be possible to make the trip?" he asked of Bob, during the course of the meal.

"It'll have to be done by dead reckonin', of course," the old sailor replied in as near an approach to a friendly tone as he could command, for the recent trouble was yet too fresh in mind to admit of his feeling thoroughly at ease. "It don't matter what port we make, an' as it's all plain sailin' after we're clear of the bank, the job oughter be done without much trouble."

"The most important question is, When can we start?" the Mexican said with an odd laugh. "I've had so much of this key lately that I'd like to see it a dozen miles astern just now."

"I fancy we're all of the same mind," said Joe, who seemed to think it necessary he should say something, if only to show he harbored no resentment. "We shan't have long to wait, I hope."

By this time the engineer and Bob had finished the meal, while the others seemed to have hardly begun. It was as if they had some purpose in remaining a long time at the table; but yet one could not have seen in their manner anything to arouse suspicion.

The old sailor and Joe arose from the table and went up the companion-way ladder as the former said:

"It's too hot to stay below any longer than a feller is obliged to, an' I reckon you can get on as well without us."

The thin man replied that there was no reason why one should suffer discomfort because others were slow, and by the time he had finished speaking Bob and Joe were on deck, looking with satisfaction at the result of their labors.

"We shan't be hanging round the Bahama banks much longer, my hearty," the old sailor said gleefully. "Now that the brig has deep water under her keel once more, it's only a question of wind."

"I don't suppose it would pay to hang on here until the tug could be repaired?" Joe added half inquiringly, as he went forward where the shadow of the forecastle afforded a most refreshing shelter.

"Indeed it wouldn't," and Bob spoke very decidedly. "In the first place we must get this craft off our hands without loss of time; an' then, ag'in, the sooner we've said good-by to them new shipmates the safer I'll feel. They ain't to be trusted any further'n you can see 'em; but we've got to mess with the crowd till the brig's in port."

Joe looked toward the steamer wistfully. He had suffered so many hardships and been exposed to such great danger in her that it would be almost like parting with an old friend to leave the little

craft to rot at her moorings, or be blown ashore when the next gale should come from the east.

While these two were cheering themselves with the belief that in a few hours at the longest the brig would be under way again, those in the cabin were proceeding to make themselves thoroughly at home.

Bob and Joe had no sooner gone on deck than the red-nosed man said, in a whisper:

"Now, Dave, you stay here, where it'll be easy to see if any of them fools come this way, an' I'll make quick work of the search. If the brig's papers are to be found we shall run no risk in taking her anywhere, an' we'll soon set ourselves up for gentlemen."

"Unless somebody overhauls us for that little job down in the channel," the thin man added gloomily.

"Don't be a fool!" was the savage reply. "How is any one to know we had a finger in that pie? Even if it should come out, we won't be in this part of the world much longer. We can put in to Key West, hire a full crew, and an hour afterwards sail for any port we like best. Come on, Pedro."

The Mexican had already risen from the table, and was noiselessly making his way aft to the room on the starboard side which would naturally have been occupied by the Bonita's rightful captain.

The red-nosed man made haste to overtake him, as if doubtful of his friend's honesty, and the two entered the apartment at the same moment.

Up to this time no one had disturbed the watch which hung at the head of the berth. The boys

and Bob believed that every article on board should be delivered up to the authorities; but these men had no such scruples.

He with the red nose clutched it eagerly, almost overturning the other in his efforts to reach the time-piece first, and against this confiscation the Mexican protested angrily.

"Don't be a fool! I've only taken charge of it for all hands. We're to whack up fair on everything!"

"Then why didn't you let it hang on the wall?"

"Because that fool of a Bob might have stowed it away before we've had a chance to take possession. Now, don't stop to chin, but help me hunt over these papers."

The Mexican looked much as if he distrusted the softly-spoken words; but he made no further protest, and together the two men began to overhaul the contents of the desk.

To find that for which they sought was not a difficult task. It was only necessary to examine half a dozen papers before the documents were discovered, and the red-nosed man said grimly, as he put them in his pocket:

"I reckon we've got things pretty near as we want 'em. We're the masters now, an' there'll be mighty little talk made about rights. Come along; if we're not on deck soon them Miss Nancys may suspect somethin', an' we want to keep their eyes closed two or three hours longer."

"But ain't we goin' to search the other rooms?"

"What's the use? There'll be plenty of time to-morrow, when we're alone."

The worthy Pedro was not content to wait. The loss of the watch, for he seemed to consider it such, troubled him, and he was eager to put something in his own pocket.

When he who was evidently the leader of the party walked toward Dave to acquaint him with the pleasing fact that the search had been successful, Pedro darted from one room to another, and the studs and sleeve-buttons, which the boys had noted, did not escape his eager gaze.

"These shall not be taken charge of for all hands," he whispered half to himself, and the articles had but just been secreted when Dave came to the door.

"Do you want to spoil everything by loafin' 'round here?" he asked angrily. "These kind of chances don't come every day, an' if our plans are upset owin' to such nonsense I'll split you like a mackerel with your own knife!"

That the Mexican was a rank coward could be told by the pallor which came over his yellow face as these words were spoken, and with a muttered but inaudible reply he followed Dave to the companion-way ladder.

"Now what are we to do?" the thin man asked when the three were ready to go on deck; and the leader of the villains replied readily:

"Nothin' yet awhile. Some chance will turn up before we're under way; but if it don't, the matter

must be settled at night while they're below. It won't be a hard job, for they can't stay on deck together all the time, and when the crowd is separated it'll be like child's play. Don't act as if anything was in the wind, but be sweet as molasses till the flies are where we wan't 'em!"

Then the three men ascended the ladder, and from the benign expression on their faces the most suspicious would hardly have fancied they had been plotting to murder those who befriended them in a time of need.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRICKED.

WHEN the conspirators came on deck, and before they finished smoking, the boys cleaned the cabin, ate their own dinner in the galley, and were at liberty to remain idle until it should be time to prepare supper.

After the heat of the day had passed Bob proposed that all the brig's lower sails should be set; adding, in conclusion:

"'Cordin' to my way of thinkin', there's goin' to be a decent kind of a breeze about sunset, an' if we're ready for it jes' so much time will be saved in leavin' this place."

The three strangers appeared even more eager than he to see the brig under canvas once more, and all hands turned to with a will, pulling, hoisting, and sheeting home as if the wind which was to waft them toward the United States had already begun to blow.

By the time this work was done there could no longer be any question but that a generous breeze from the south was near at hand. Thin, filmy clouds formed in the sky, while every now and then

the heated air would be set in motion slightly, as a token of what might be expected.

"There's no doubt now but that we'll be under way by sunset," Joe said, as he stood on the quarter-deck where the boys had taken refuge from the heat, "and it would be a good idea for me to be bringing my dunnage out of the tug, since it ain't likely I'll ever see the little craft again."

"Ain't you goin' to try and save anything else?" Jim asked.

"There isn't much that we can take. Suppose all hands go aboard and see if there's anything belonging to the crew that'll pay for carrying away?"

The boys accepted the invitation readily, for they did not care to move about the deck of the brig very much lest they came in contact with the red-nosed man and his friends, and all four went into the tiny after-cabin of the Sea Bird, where Joe at once began his work of investigation.

There were four chests here in addition to the one owned by Joe, and these were broken open without ceremony, for the engineer did not intend to burden himself with anything that might not be of considerable value to the owners.

"We'll unpack 'em, and then put the things back carefully, in case the little craft is carried home again," he said, going to work systematically, while the boys watched him with mild curiosity.

There was no apparent necessity for haste, therefore Joe set about his task leisurely because of the intense heat, which made the slightest exertion

almost painful, and but two of the chests had been overhauled when Bob came below to learn what was going on.

"Gettin' ready to leave, eh?" he asked, after looking at the perspiring engineer in silence several moments. "Well, it's time; for unless I've made a big mistake in them light clouds we'll start from here mighty soon."

"If we were going alone I'd feel tiptop," Joe said, as he paused for an instant in his work; "but as it is, I'm afraid we'll have trouble with that crowd before the United States coast heaves in sight, even if they do talk so fair just now."

"We must keep our weather-eyes liftin' every minute, an' at the first sign of a row pitch in so's to take 'em unawares;" and Bob stretched himself out on the port locker as if determined to enjoy all possible comfort before the serious work of sailing the brig without an experienced navigator was begun. "I wouldn't hesitate to give 'em the slip by leavin' the whole crowd here; but there's no chance of their goin' ashore after the wind rises."

"No," Joe replied, with a long-drawn sigh, "we shall have to grin an' bear it, I reckon; but ——"

He ceased speaking very suddenly, for just at that moment a footstep was heard on the steamer's deck, and an instant later the unpleasant-looking face of the man with the red nose appeared at the companion-way.

"You all got outer sight so quick that I thought p'rhaps you'd gone overboard," he said with a leer,

glancing inquisitively around the cabin, but making no motion to descend.

"Joe is overhaulin' this dunnage, to see if there's anything worth carryin' back to the States," Bob replied carelessly, as the engineer continued his work in silence.

The man lowered his head as if to see the interior more plainly, and, unperceived by any one in the little apartment, made a quick motion with his hand, evidently for the benefit of those aboard the brig.

During nearly five minutes he stood there carelessly pushing the hatch back and forth, until the Mexican waved his hat, when the red-nosed man suddenly shut both doors, shoving into place the bolts which fastened them together.

The little party in the cabin looked up in surprise at this singular maneuver, but it was not until the sound of quick footsteps was heard on the deck as the man ran swiftly aboard the brig that any one thought of treachery.

"They've locked us in here so's they can steal the Bonita!" Bob shouted, as he leaped to the companion-way and began pounding on the bolted doors.

The oaken timbers were firm as a bulk-head, and, without a weapon, he might have worked there all day in vain.

Joe had sprung to the windows; but his efforts were quite as useless as Bob's. Heavy iron gratings, intended to keep out intruders and break the force of the waves, were screwed so firmly in the wood-

work that they could not be removed from the inside save by the use of proper tools.

They were securely imprisoned, for the cabin had no outlet except at the companion-way, and two or three hours of hard work would be absolutely necessary before they could escape by the doors.

While Bob and Joe were darting from one possible point of vantage to another, shouting for help and uttering wild threats in the same breath, the boys had gathered at one of the port windows which looked directly on the brig's bulwarks.

"They ain't gettin' under way!" Jim cried, as if trying to persuade himself that the strangers were not intending to desert them.

"There's no need for the pirates to hurry," Bob said hoarsely, as he stood in the center of the cabin, his face convulsed by rage and trembling like one in an ague fit. "If I had jumped on 'em with the belayin'-pin when Joe held me back, all of that crowd wouldn't be able to get away. Come here, you cowards, an' give us a fair show! Open this hatch or I'll foller you till your lives won't be worth the livin'!"

"The hawsers have been cast off, an' now the brig is beginnin' to move through the water!" Jim reported, as he pressed his face close to the iron bars.

This information gave fresh impetus to Bob's wrath. He rushed from one corner of the cabin to another shouting the wildest threats, and behaving generally like an insane person.

Joe was quite as angry as the old sailor, but not to such an extent that his common sense had deserted him. While Bob strode back and forth he was working on the screws which held the bars in place. By breaking off the end of the largest blade in his pocket-knife quite an effective tool was made, and he had accomplished no slight portion of his task when Jim made the last report.

Rapidly as the engineer might labor, however, he knew it would be impossible to remove this one particular barrier to freedom before the Bonita would be beyond their reach. The promised wind had come sooner than it was expected, as could be told by the rapidly increasing speed with which the black bulwarks of the brig slipped past the window, and the task was not half completed when blue water could be seen as the vessel's stern swept by, leaving a wake which bubbled and danced merrily in the sunlight.

"There must be a pretty good breeze," Jim continued, speaking excitedly, as if the tears were very near his eyelids, "for the upper sails are all draw ing. Now I can see that red-nosed bully at the wheel, an' he's wavin' his hat!"

Joe continued to work at the bars, and now, when it was too late to effect anything, Bob recovered from his anger sufficiently to make at least an attempt at assisting, while Harry and Walter stood near the companion-way, so thoroughly bewildered by this last blow of a cruel fate that speech was well nigh impossible.

The brig remained within Jim's range of vision but a few moments longer, and when she disappeared entirely he threw himself on a locker, trying to stifle with its cushion the sobs which convulsed him.

Without speaking, breathing like one after a long race, and heeding not the wounds on his fingers inflicted by the sharp edge of the knife, Joe worked on until the iron grating was held in place only by a couple of screws on one side. Then, standing on the locker, he used his foot as a battering-ram until the wood-work gave way, and the bars fell to the deck with a clatter and a crash that must have been heard by those on the brig.

If it had been possible to overtake the thieves the prisoners could not have clambered out through the window more quickly, and on gaining the deck the uselessness of any further efforts was painfully apparent.

The Bonita was already out of the little harbor, bowing and courtesying on the ocean swell to the wind from the south which filled all her sails, and gliding through the water as if rejoicing at her escape from the shoal.

"Can't we row out to them?" Jim cried excitedly. "It wouldn't take long to launch the tug's yawl!"

"We couldn't catch 'em with anything slower than a steamer, now that they're well under way!" Bob cried angrily; and then, unfastening the hatch, he went into the cabin once more, as if unable to look longer at the rapidly retreating brig.

"It's no use, boys; we've got to make the best of

what can't be cured!" Joe said with a great but vain effort to speak in a cheery tone. "We must try and forget what has happened or we shall be in no condition to help ourselves." Then, noting the tears in Walter's eyes, he added kindly: "Think of how much worse we might be situated. The Sea Bird isn't injured past mending, and in her we can make any port we choose."

"But you said it would be two or three weeks before she could be repaired," and Harry choked back a sob lest the evidences of his own grief should make Walter's sorrow greater.

"In that I may have been mistaken. Let's set to work as if nothing had happened, and think only about going home presently with no one on board of whom we are afraid. You boys get the yawl into the water, so we can land at any time, and I'll begin the job on the engine.

CHAPTER XVII.

REPAIRING THE SEA BIRD.

IT WAS extremely difficult for anyone on the tug to set about work while the sense of injury and grief was so fresh in his mind, and had it not been for Joe all hands would have given way to sorrow and anger, a course which could certainly bring no relief. He bustled around as if there was not a thought in his mind beyond repairing the engine, calling for assistance first upon one of the boys and then Bob, until they were absolutely forced to take an interest in the work.

He insisted that the yawl must be gotten into the water without delay, because his duties might necessitate his going ashore at a moment's notice; and it was nearly time for the sun to set before the little boat was in sailing trim. While the boys were engaged in this work Joe called upon Bob so often that the old sailor grew quite eager to see the job progress, and, like the others, almost ceased to dwell upon the bitter disappointment.

When the boat was launched, Joe advised the boys to go into the tiny galley of the tug for the purpose of getting supper, concluding by saying:

"It ain't as big as the one on the Bonita; but

you'll find better tools to work with, because everything is new. There must be grub enough to last ten days or more; but if not, we'll do a little hunting and fishing. This is the season for turtles, so we can have plenty of meat and eggs; and there's no show of being put on short allowance, even if we should stay here a month."

This remark about food aroused Bob from the mournful reverie into which he had fallen for the moment, and he said with something like his old cheerfulness, as he started forward:

"I'll overhaul the stores, so we'll know jes' what there is on board; but it won't do any harm for you boys to go fishin' now an' then, seein' that you can't do very much work in the engine-room."

Then he went into the fore-peak. Jim and Walter built a fire in the stove, which occupied fully half the space in the tiny galley, and Harry set about laying the forward-cabin table with the limited collection of crockery.

Joe came from the hot engine-room when the others were fully occupied. He had not really begun his task, nor did he intend to do so until the next morning when some kind of a bench could be set up in the open air, although he had moved about very lively to keep the minds of his companions on something besides their own misfortunes.

It was not long before Bob finished taking account of the eatables, and on coming from the hold he reported:

"We've got fully half a barrel of flour, about

twenty pounds of salt pork, twice as much beef, and two hams. There's coffee enough to last this crew four or five weeks, with canned milk to help it out. Two dozen tins of assorted vegetables, three bushels of potatoes, plenty of salt, pepper, molasses and vinegar. Pretty nigh a whole tub of butter, another of lard, and a barrel two-thirds full of ship's-biscuit. We sha'n't starve yet awhile; but it stands us in hand to do some fishin' an' huntin' before we leave this place—if we ever do."

"Now, don't talk that way, Bob," Joe said with a laugh. "I give you my word that the engine can be repaired, so of course we shall leave here."

"How much coal have you got?"

Joe's face darkened. The fuel supply was the only thing of which he had not thought, and he knew there was only such an amount on board as would serve to keep up steam about forty-eight hours.

"I don't suppose we've got enough for the run across," he said after a short pause; "but we can take on plenty of wood, or make our way into Nassau, where, by giving a distress note on the steamer, it will be possible to get all that may be needed. If we could only manage to patch the bow a little better I wouldn't feel worried about anything."

"That's jes' what I've made up my mind to do," Bob replied. "If you don't call on me too often, I reckon I can show a pretty decent job of carpentering by the time you're ready to make steam."

"After to-morrow night I shan't need much help, so you'll have plenty of time," Joe said with a laugh; and then the conversation was interrupted by Walter's announcement that supper was ready.

Jim had taken especial pains with this meal, probably acting on the belief that grief is lessened when the stomach is satisfied, and all hands seated themselves at the table, which occupied nearly the entire floor-space of the little cabin, looking far more cheerful than one would have supposed under the circumstances.

"There's a big advantage about living here," Joe said, as he lighted the swinging lamp that the interior might seem more cheerful. "Everything is snugger than on the brig. We've got one bunk apiece, and none to spare; the bedding is clean because it's new, while Jim's work is easier owin' to the fact of the galley bein' alongside the dining-room."

"Yes," Bob said, as he choked down a sigh with a big piece of ham, "we're pretty well fixed considerin'; an' if the Bonita had gone to the bottom, or been burned up, I wouldn't feel sore a bit. It's the idea that the same villains we brought off the key to save 'em from starvation have run away with the brig which riles me. Howsomever," he added, as he helped himself to another potato, "it don't do any good to talk of sich rascality, an' we may as well chuck ourselves under the chin 'cause things are no worse."

Then Joe made sure the conversation would not

again drift into such a dangerous channel by talking of the needed repairs until the meal was finished and the dishes washed, after which all hands went on deck to enjoy the cooling breeze.

"If we could sleep here it would be possible to take some comfort," Harry suggested, as the old sailor made preparations for his after-supper smoke. "It'll be terribly hot in the cabin."

"Suppose we do that same thing?" Joe said, quickly. "I'm going to spread the foresail as an awning in the morning to make a work-room, and if we should put it up now there'd be nothing else necessary but bring the bedding on deck."

Bob showed that he thought the plan a good one by laying down his pipe and going forward. The others followed, and in a short time the little foresail was unbent, the canvas stretched from the roof of the house aft to a couple of oars lashed to the rail, and the boys made up the beds.

It was fully half an hour before sunrise next morning when Bob called all hands, and the task of repairing the Sea Bird was begun without delay. Joe had his tools and spare fittings on deck by the time breakfast was ready, and Bob mapped out his work during the same interval.

"You boys are to go ashore," the old sailor said when the little party had gathered around the table. "We haven't got much water, an' if you can find a spring it'll save wastin' coal to condense what'll be needed."

An excursion on the island was by no means a

hardship, and but little time was spent setting the galley and cabin to rights after the meal had been brought to an end.

"The key ain't so small but that you can get lost on it an' not half try," Bob shouted, as Jim and Harry took up the oars, leaving Walter to play the part of coxswain. "Keep your bearings well in mind, an' don't go far from the shore."

Jim waved his hand to show that the commands were understood, and then the little boat was propelled swiftly toward the key.

Bob watched the boys until they landed, fastened the yawl by tying the painter around a projecting piece of coral, and disappeared in the underbrush, after which he went aft, where Joe had set up a very shaky work-bench and was busily engaged measuring a plate of metal.

"Them two city-bred youngsters are having the worst end of this queer cruise," the sailor said thoughtfully. "To an old moss-back like me, it don't make much difference whether he's on the Bahamas or the Sandwich Islands, providin' there's plenty of grub; but the lads must come pretty nigh eatin' their hearts out sometimes when they think of home an' the sadness that's in it through their disappearin' so mysterious-like."

"It's tough on them, and that's a fact," Joe replied; "but they keep the trouble to themselves in a way that ought to teach us a lesson. A man, or a boy either, for that matter, should put his best foot forward, no matter how hard a place he gets in, an'

then half the battle's won before a blow can be struck."

Joe had no opportunity to continue the subject because Bob walked into the cabin. The conversation was growing altogether too personal to please the old sailor, for he knew perfectly well that he had been more than foolish in giving such free rein to his temper and grief when the perfidy of the strangers was first made apparent, and, like many others, he did not care to be told of his faults.

He proposed to further repair the damage done the Sea Bird by planking outside the canvas, and to procure the necessary lumber he must take it from the bulk-head between the after-cabin and the engine-room.

This he now proceeded to do, and while the pounding and hammering went on below, as if the little steamer was being torn to pieces, Joe continued what was both a difficult and laborious task. A piece of metal such as could have been cut and planed down into the required shape in half a day with the proper tools, he was forced to fashion from thick plates with nothing more effective than a file. Although accustomed to "look upon the bright side of trouble," it was impossible to conceal from himself the unpleasant fact that two or three weeks might elapse before the job could be finished satisfactorily, and during such time a gale from the east might make the Sea Bird a total wreck.

These disagreeable thoughts did not prevent him from working industriously on what seemed an al-

most endless task, and he had not ceased his labors for a single moment, even though fully two hours were passed, when a loud noise from the shore attracted his attention.

"Something has gone wrong with the boys!" he shouted; and Bob rushed on deck in the greatest excitement as he asked, impatiently:

"What's the matter? Have you seen anything?"

"No; but listen to that yelling. It isn't possible they have found human beings on the key, and unless they're in trouble I don't see why there should be such an uproar."

There was but little time for speculation. Almost before Joe ceased speaking the boys came from the underbrush at full speed and leaped into the boat after launching her, Jim and Walter pulling energetically at the oars while Harry waved some small object above his head.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SINGULAR DOCUMENT.

IN ORDER to better understand the cause of the boys' excitement it will be well to follow them from the time they stepped ashore on the little key in search of water; otherwise it might require the reader more time than it did Bob and Joe to learn all the details of the story.

The novelty of standing on the solid earth once more, after having been tossed about by the sea, was very pleasant, and the boys enjoyed it hugely. The sun had not yet heated the cool night-air which lingered among the underbrush, and they plunged through the dense portions of the thicket as if the very contact of the foliage was a luxury.

The oddly-shaped leaves, unfamiliar trees and wire-like grass claimed their attention for fully half an hour to the exclusion of everything else, and it is barely possible that the purpose for which they landed might have been forgotten if Jim had not reminded them of the fact by saying:

"Look here, fellers, it won't do for us to caper 'round here much longer, 'cause Bob'll be hoppin' mad if we ain't back soon to tell him whether there's a supply of water. We'll have plenty

chances to come ashore before the Sea Bird is repaired, an' to steer clear of a row we'd better get to work."

Thus reminded of their duties, Harry and Walter assumed a business-like air, and under the direction of Jim set about exploring the key in a methodical manner.

Before proceeding more than fifty yards straight back from the cove the question of water was settled, at the same time that evidences of the men who had done them such grievous injury were found.

In the sand amid a thicket of palms was a spring whose clear, sparkling water bubbled up apparently through the solid rock, forming a tiny stream which flowed toward the east some distance and was then lost amid the dazzling sand. Near by the underbrush had been trampled down, while a quantity of embers told unmistakably that here the three men had camped several days.

"They wasn't very near starvin' if this was where they hung out," Jim said as he lifted from amid the foliage a small sack of yams and another half-filled with ship's-biscuit. "Here's enough to keep 'em alive longer'n they had any right to live, an' by the looks of them oyster-shells I should think it had been a reg'lar Thanksgivin' Day with 'em."

"All three ate as if they were hungry when they came aboard the brig," Harry suggested.

"That was to throw dust into Bob's eyes. Anyhow, these bags show as how the villains weren't

left here by accident. If we could know all about the crowd I reckon we'd think ourselves lucky in gettin' rid of them with only the loss of the brig."

The thought of how they were tricked was one Harry did not care to entertain very long just at this time, when he had succeeded in partially banishing his great grief, and as a means of checking such conversation he said:

"I suppose we ought to go back and tell Bob there is plenty of water here."

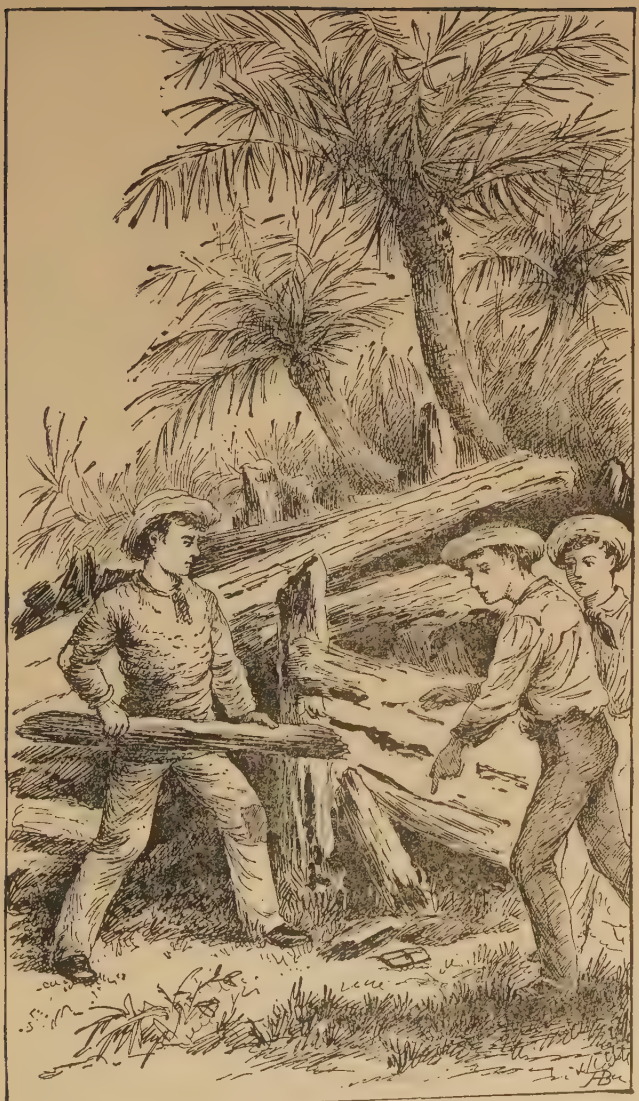
"We've got time enough for that. Let's look 'round a little more, for I'd like to find out where them oysters came from," Jim replied; and Walter started at once through the thicket as if eager to hide from view this very unpleasant reminder of their enemies.

"It won't take long to walk across the key," Jim said as he followed close behind the leader; "an' if we keep straight ahead there's no chance of gettin' lost."

"We can go on for awhile, at any rate," Harry replied, "and if the distance is too great there's nothing to prevent us from turning around."

It was destined, however, that they should not penetrate very far into the interior of the island. Walter had led the party little more than a quarter of a mile when he halted in front of a veritable hut in the midst of a palmetto thicket.

Just for an instant the boys believed the key was inhabited; but as they pushed further among the luxuriant vegetation that question was settled, at



Harry sprung forward with a shout as he pointed to a small, dark object.—(See page 155.)

least so far as this particular building was concerned. It had originally been a rude affair about ten feet square, and evidently built from the fragments of a vessel, but was now little more than a pile of timbers. One end and part of a side yet remained standing, the balance thrown down as if decay rather than man or the fury of the elements had caused the collapse.

The boys walked around it, trying to peer under the rotten planks in the hope of seeing some evidences of its former occupancy, until Walter said impatiently:

"There's nothing here worth looking at, so let's go on."

"Wait a bit," Jim replied, as he began overhauling the ruins. "If we could find two or three sound planks Bob would think we'd made a fair day's work, 'cause he needs a good deal of lumber."

Harry had not thought it possible the discovery could be of any value until this suggestion of Jim's, and then he worked with a will among the ruins, knowing full well how delighted the old sailor would be with two or three stout timbers.

It seemed hardly probable any very useful material could be gathered from the pile of rubbish, for that portion of the hut yet standing was in such a condition of decay that, as the fragments inside were removed, it came tumbling down with a crash, sending the centipedes and other crawling things scuttling away in every direction, while the dust rose in

dense clouds, which caused the boys to sneeze as if a huge snuff-box had been overturned.

"According to the looks of that we sha'n't find very many serviceable pieces," Walter said when it was possible to speak again. "This stuff is so rotten that it wouldn't even make good fuel."

"I reckon you're right;" and as he spoke Jim pulled toward him the corner-post, which had broken off close to the sand.

In dragging it out the wood crumbled to pieces, and Harry, who was a few feet away, sprung forward with a shout as he pointed to a small, dark object amid the fragments.

"Look at that! There's something hidden in the timber!"

Pressing forward, the boys saw a square black mass five inches long, four wide, and a trifle more than one inch in thickness, which was lying apparently in the very heart of the wood. The briefest examination revealed the fact that the odd-looking thing was in a cavity or recess which had been cut in the timber at what must have been about four feet from the ground when the post formed a portion of the hut. It had been most skillfully done, and concealed from view by a thin piece of wood rabbeted-in so neatly as to make it appear like the solid post. Even now, after so many years must have elapsed, it was difficult to see the joints; therefore when first done one would have looked in vain for marks of a tool on the timber.

"What is it?" Jim cried excitedly as he gazed at

the black object, but made no move toward taking it from the recess where it had so long remained hidden.

"It's something valuable, or it wouldn't have been put away like that. P'rhaps a pirate has left it for safe-keeping, and couldn't get back after it," Harry suggested.

"He couldn't have been any very great shakes of a pirate if that's all he had to hide!" Jim said with a tone of contempt for the possibly blood-thirsty owner of the package which he now lifted from its wooden case.

The boys gathered close around; but the most minute examination failed to reveal anything more valuable than a mass of tar.

"There must be something inside!" Walter cried excitedly, "for no one would have taken so much trouble to put such stuff away. Cut it open!"

Jim was soon chopping at the black mass with his pocket-knife, and but a few strokes were necessary to show that the tar simply covered a cunningly-plaited net-work of stout cord fashioned somewhat like an envelope.

"Be careful when you stick the knife through!" Harry cried warningly. "There must be something precious inside, sure!"

Jim did not intend to run any risk of ruining the contents by a hasty stroke. After scraping the tar off sufficiently to expose the cords straight across both ends, he cut them carefully apart until the envelope was divided like an open wallet, exposing to view two thin sheets of wood.

"It's nothing but paper!" Walter exclaimed in a tone of most intense disappointment as Jim separated this inner covering, showing what appeared to be the attempt of some amateur to draw a diagram on a soiled piece of stout paper.

At the top of the sheet, which was yellow and time-worn, were two lines, as follows:

XLI. fathoms N. N. E. from this timber to palmetto tree.
XII. fathoms S. E. by E. to coral-head.

This information, if such it could be called, was jotted down in fanciful letters instead of writing, and immediately beneath it appeared the rude drawing of a hut, a crooked tree, and a rock or piece of coral. From one to the other arrows were placed to mark the probable direction as given above, while below was what looked like a representation of an island or key.

Then was written, in angular penmanship, the following:

We solemnly swear not to disturb the treasure buried by us this day, except in the presence of all the owners, or after receiving proof that one or more are dead.

(Signed) BARTH MEADOWS.
His
PEDRO ✕ GONZALES.
mark.
E. BONN.
His
JOSEF ✕ HARTTMAN.
mark.

For several moments after Harry ceased reading this singular document the boys stood staring at the faded characters in silence, and then Jim exclaimed:

"I'll bet them was pirates what wrote that, an' if we could only make out what it means there'd be a big pile of gold found. Let's go on board an' show it to Bob!"

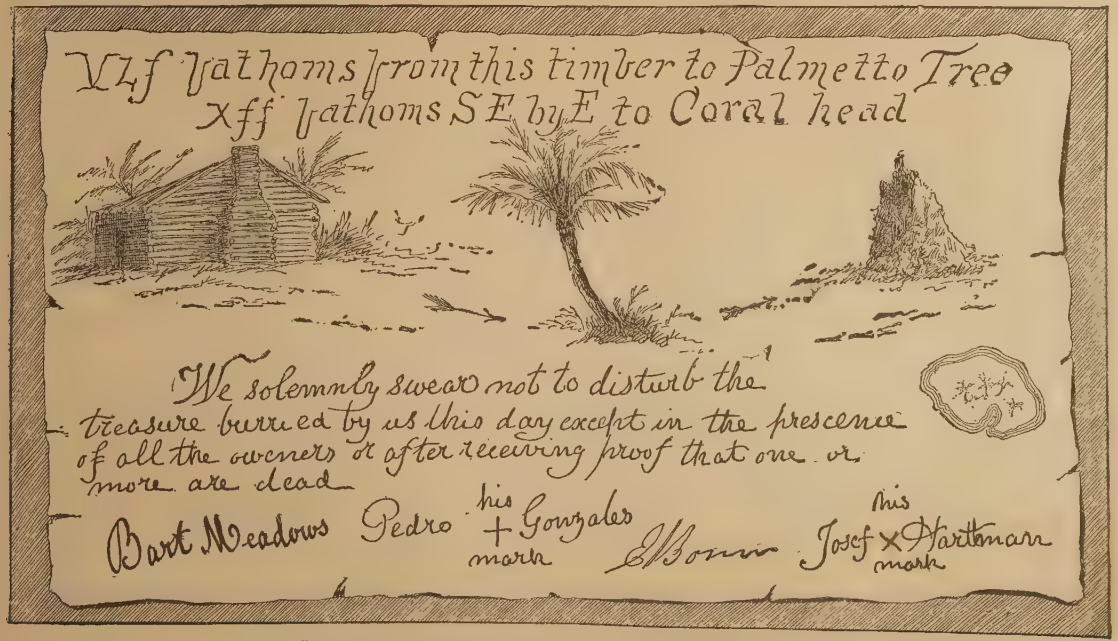
The mere suggestion that they had the clew to a buried treasure was sufficient to throw all three into a perfect fever of excitement, and after carefully gathering up the coverings they started at full speed for the shore, shouting to each other, as they ran, the most improbable theories concerning the ancient document and its signers until the key resounded with their cries.

"Perhaps the men who ran away with the brig belong to the same gang who hid the paper," Walter suggested in a tremulous tone, glancing behind him every few moments, as if fancying they might be pursued.

"That couldn't be," Harry replied, panting because of the rapid pace, "unless they've taken the gold with them."

For an instant the boys' joy decreased very materially, and then grew strong once more as Jim said, confidently:

"If they had we'd seen somethin' of it; but them duffers didn't have any baggage when they come aboard. The Bonita wouldn't 'a' left the cove so quick if the men had known about this. I tell you, fellers, it was lucky for us that they stole the brig!"


V4f Vathoms from this timber to Palmetto Tree
Xff Vathoms SE by E to Coral head
We solemnly swear not to disturb the treasure buried by us this day except in the presence of all the owners or after receiving proof that one or more are dead
Bart Meadows
Pedro + his mark Gonzales
Josef × his mark Hartmann

Fac-simile of paper found by the boys.—(See page 157.)

Then, as if unable longer to act like rational beings, the explorers burst into loud, incoherent shouts, which sadly lessened their speed because of the extra amount of breath required to continue the outcries.

It was this uproar which Joe heard, and he and Bob were wholly at a loss to understand what had happened as the yawl, with her noisy crew, approached the tug.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNEXPECTED VISIT.

IT WAS fully ten minutes after the excited boys arrived at the Sea Bird before Bob and Joe could understand the meaning of the document which Harry waved so triumphantly above his head, or learn where and how it had been found. Each one insisted on telling the story at the same time, and the result was that nothing could be distinctly heard until Bob shouted:

"Hold up, lads! Give yourselves time to elect a president who can do the talkin', an' then p'rhaps me an' Joe'll find out whether you've seen the Bonita or discovered a bridge that leads to New York!"

"Let Harry tell the story while Walt an' me bail the yawl. Her seams haven't swelled enough yet to prevent her from takin' in water;" and Jim went forward resolving not to say another word until the matter was fully explained; but before Harry had well begun the recital both he and Walter were assisting in the conversation.

Bob and Joe did finally succeed in learning all the particulars regarding the finding of the manuscript, and then their excitement equaled that of the boys.

"There ain't any question but what the lads have lighted on the secret of a pirate's treasure," the old sailor said in a positive tone, and looking around at his companions as if challenging either of them to contradict him. "Years ago these keys used to be a great place for 'em to sneak in an' out of, an' it stands to reason this would 'a' been jes' the kind of a harbor they'd try to make, 'cause there's water enough here to float a good-sized craft."

"But it's a big question as to whether we can find it;" and Joe examined the document carefully once more. "It has been a good while since this was written, and perhaps both the tree and the coral rock have disappeared."

"It won't take very long to learn that, matey," Bob replied in a tone so cheery that it would have been difficult to believe he had felt so angry and despondent a few hours previous. "There's a good compass in the pilot-house, an' with it an' your tape-measure we'll be able to lay out the course to a hair."

"Do you mean to knock off work for the sake of going treasure-hunting?" Joe asked in mild surprise.

"Why not? Two or three days won't make much difference to us when the repairs are a question of weeks, an' there's no great danger of an easterly gale at this time of year."

It did not require any lengthy or able argument to convince Joe that he would be warranted in ceasing his work as machinist to become a treasure-

seeker, for he was fully as eager as Bob to test the truth of the apparent statement contained in the document.

Half an hour after the boys came on board all hands were ready for a return to the key. The compass had been placed in the stern-sheets of the yawl; Joe carried the measuring-tape in his pocket, and all was in readiness for the start, when the old sailor suggested that one of the Sea Bird's anchors be dropped.

"I ain't afraid of her slippin' the Bonita's hawser," he said; "but it'll be a good idea to prevent her from swinging round into shoal water."

Anything, no matter how much labor it might involve, which would guard against a loss or further disablement of their second and only remaining craft should be attended to, and all hands assisted in the work. The tug's smallest anchor was let go with the cable made fast to the stern bitt, and unless a violent storm should arise she would lay to her moorings as safely as if in a dry-dock.

Bob looked once more to the stopper on the bow hawser, as if the idea of leaving the little steamer even for so short a time made him uneasy regarding her safety; and then, when about to step over the rail into the yawl, he involuntarily glanced seaward.

"Well, if that don't take all the wind outer my sails!" he exclaimed, pointing with one hand toward the open ocean as he shaded his eyes with the other. "An hour ago I'd 'a' been glad to see sich a sight as

that; but with the paper the boys found I've kinder lost all hankerin' for a chance to leave this key."

The remainder of the party were already on board the yawl, and it was some seconds before the full meaning of his words could be understood. It was Harry who first caught a glimpse of that which attracted the old sailor's attention, and he cried, as he clambered over the steamer's rail:

"It's a vessel! Father has sent some one to look for us, and now we can go home!"

"I reckon you're wrong there, lad," Bob said as his companions gathered around him, all gazing intently at a small schooner which was creeping slowly toward the key from the south-east, evidently heading directly for the cove. "That craft hasn't got American sailors on board by considerable. She looks like a fisherman—most likely comin' here for turtles. Whatever she is, we must put off goin' ashore for a spell."

Joe quickly brought the compass from the yawl, that no evidences of their intended visit ashore should be seen, and said, as he took up his tools once more:

"We'd better keep right on about our work, for in case they are coming here it may look suspicious to see us loafing when the steamer is so nearly a wreck."

But for the document found by the boys Joe would not have had such a thought. Now, however, the possibility that there might be a large amount of treasure secreted on the key made him over-cautious and distrustful.

Bob returned to the cabin, for the "curse of wealth" had also begun to make itself felt on him, and the three boys watched the approach of the stranger, but far less eagerly than would have been the case a few hours previous.

Slowly the schooner drew nearer, still heading directly for the cove, and shortening sail only when she was inside the outer point of land.

"Come on deck, Bob," Joe said in a low tone. "She's got just about way enough on to fetch us, and there's no question but that she's coming to anchor close alongside."

Bob emerged from the companion-way as the schooner swung around to her cable, and a man who was standing near the wheel shouted:

"Steamer ahoy!"

"Halloo!" Bob replied.

"What's the matter? Are you in distress?"

"Not exactly; we've been at the wrong end of a collision, an' put in here to patch up a little."

"Have you been ashore yet?"

"Do you suppose they know we found the paper?" Walter whispered in alarm as Bob hesitated before saying:

"Three of the crew landed this morning to look for water."

"Did you see any men there?"

"If you mean a Mexican, a thin feller, an' one with a red nose, we've seen more'n we wanted!" and by the tone of Bob's voice it could be easily understood that he was growing very angry.

"That's the crowd we're looking for!" the man on the schooner said excitedly. "On what part of the key are they?"

"You'll find 'em somewhere between here an' the coast of the United States. We had the brig Bonita in tow when we came to anchor, an' by lockin' us below on the tug they stole her!"

The man conversed with those near him for a moment, and then resumed the conversation by asking:

"When did that happen?"

"About two hours before sunset yesterday afternoon. Do you know anything of the scoundrels?"

"Considerable that ain't to their credit. They shipped at Nassau on a trading-vessel, and tried to get up a mutiny in order to seize the craft. The captain marooned them here, and we shouldn't have troubled our heads about such a lot if it had not been learned that they murdered two turtle-fishers in the North-west Channel three weeks ago simply for the small amount of money the men received from sale of the cargo. It looks now as if the villains had given us the slip."

"I ain't so sure of that," Bob replied after some thought. "The brig is a decently heavy sailer, an' there hasn't been wind enough to take her very far away. The chances are they're loafin' 'round the Bank now."

As may be supposed, the crew of the Sea Bird were astonished at learning the true character of those whom they would have befriended. That the

men were scoundrels there had been good proof; but to learn they were murderers as well, shocked all hands.

"It's a good thing we didn't sail on the Bonita," Walter said in a whisper. "If they'd kill two fishermen for a little money, I'm sure there wouldn't have been much hesitation about butchering us before we arrived in port, so they could claim the brig."

"All that appears unfortunate is not ill-luck," Joe added; and then the captain of the schooner shouted:

"We'll give them a chase, anyhow. Tell us the full particulars concerning the brig, and if we don't succeed in catching the murderers it will be easy to send the information to every port they're likely to enter. By that means they'll be prevented from enjoying the stolen property very long. Come aboard, where we can talk without such a waste of wind!"

"Let's all hands go," Bob suggested; and in a few moments the crew of the Sea Bird were on the schooner—Harry telling the story of how he, Walter and Jim were carried away by the Bonita; Bob relating the particulars of the Trade Wind's loss, and Joe giving an account of the collision.

"It's kind of a mixed up affair," the captain said, rubbing his nose vigorously, as if to quicken memory, "and I reckon it'll be safer to take down all the names, so's there'll be no mistake."

"I'll write out the whole thing for you," Harry

proposed, and the captain appeared to be relieved by the proposition.

"I ain't got much of a fist for writin'," he replied half-apologetically, "an' it'll save me a deal of time." Then, as Harry began what of necessity would be quite a lengthy narrative, he asked Bob: "Is there anything we can do for you? Have you stores enough for a decently long voyage?"

"I reckon we have everything needful except coal, an' we'll have to run into Nassau for that. If you'll give me the course it'll be a big help, seein's how I ain't very much of a navigator."

This the captain was not only willing but pleased to do. He even went so far as to draw on a piece of brown paper a rude chart of the North-east Providence Channel, and the self imposed task was hardly completed when Harry brought his written story to an end.

CHAPTER XX.

TREASURE-SEEKERS.

THE CREW of the schooner obtained the fullest particulars regarding the brig, the direction of the wind when she was gotten under way, and such other information as might be of benefit to them, for the chase was to be continued to the American coast, if necessary.

"We can send for the legal papers in case the murderers have reached the United States," the captain of the schooner said; "and with such proof as we have got concerning their crime there is little doubt but that the Government will grant an extradition."

"If you should catch them, make a claim in our name for salvage on the brig," Joe said. "We brought her through a gale in which she would have been dismasted if not totally wrecked, and as she was stolen from an anchorage our rights in the matter should be respected."

"That's about the size of it, Joe," Bob added, approvingly. "If there's any fairness in law we oughter get a right tidy lot of money outer the old hooker."

"I'll attend to the business for you, my hearties;

an' what's more, them villains shall be made to answer for a cold-blooded murder if we have to keep the chase up six months. Now I allow we should get under way, for a good sailin' breeze mustn't be lost. We'll see you in Nassau, I reckon, for if things work favorably we'll be home again in a week at the latest."

This was a decided hint for the visitors to take their departure, and a few moments later they were rowing toward the Sea Bird as the schooner glided swiftly out of the little cove.

"Well, lads," Bob said, after they had watched the rapidly receding craft until her hull was shut out from view by the point of land, "now that they're off there's nothin' to prevent us from findin' out if what was writ down on that paper means anything. Get the compass. We'll take an ax an' the fire-shovel as well, for most likely there'll be a job at diggin' before it'll be possible to tell whether we're on a wild-goose chase or not."

The boys were eager to follow up the clew given by the document found at the ruined hut, and in a very short space of time everything was ready once more for a visit to the key.

It was now past noon, for the schooner had been in the harbor two or three hours; but in the excitement of hunting for treasure no one thought of eating. The heat was intense even where the sea-breeze had full range, and among the underbrush it would be almost stifling; but this discomfort was unheeded in the newborn thirst for gold.

With Bob and Joe at the oars the yawl glided over the glassy waters very swiftly, and when she was pulled up on the sand beyond reach of the tide the old sailor said, as he raised the compass:

"Lead the way, lads, an' make the course pretty nigh direct, for we don't want to cruise 'round any more'n is necessary. Joe, you take the shovel an' ax, so's the leaders can travel light."

By following up their own trail, which was distinctly marked in the underbrush, the boys had no difficulty in going directly to the ruined hut, stopping only once on the way to quench their thirst at the spring.

"This is the place, an' there's the hole in the timber where we found the paper," Harry said, as he laid his hand on the crumbling joist. "What puzzles me is to know from which side of it we're to measure forty-one fathoms."

"There can't be much of a mistake if we're to travel nor'-nor'-east," and Bob placed the compass on that portion of the shattered timber which yet remained in the sand. "It'll be a decently hard job to walk in a straight line, though, an' if we should happen to get an inch or so out of the way at the start it would throw the whole course askew."

"A few feet wouldn't matter a great deal while we've got the palmetto to guide us," Joe suggested.

"We have, if it's standin' yet; but this 'ere document was fixed up a good while ago, my hearty, an' the tree they took their bearin's from may have been blowed down a dozen times since then."

"I don't believe that could have happened more than once," Harry said, laughingly, "unless palmettoes are different from other trees."

"Well," Bob replied, gravely, "once would be enough to knock us out of reckonin', an' instead of standin' here in the hot sun chatterin' like a lot of parrots we'd better find the true course."

To lay out a straight line through the woods with nothing but a compass as guide is by no means a simple task, and of this the old sailor was well aware. He set about the work methodically, heeding not the time spent providing the result arrived at was correct, and in doing this the assistance of all was necessary.

With the compass placed squarely over the end of the post Bob sighted across it, directing Jim, who had moved off at a distance of half a dozen yards, until he was in the desired position. Then the compass was carried forward to this point, and as Joe trimmed away the branches or hewed down trees which obstructed the view, Harry walked ahead according to the old sailor's orders.

Walter made the third point in the observation; and thus the line was continued by the one in the rear going forward when the distance had been measured, until forty-one fathoms, or two hundred and forty-six feet, had been covered.

"Here we are!" Joe cried as the final living peg was in position; "and there's nothing that looks like a palmetto anywhere near. Are you sure the course is true?"

"I know it can't be half a fathom out of the way," Bob said as he wiped the perspiration from his face and gazed around in perplexity. "This is what comes of takin' a bearin' that's likely to be knocked outer line."

"If the tree isn't where it ought to be must we give up the search?" Walter asked as a look of disappointment came over his face.

"We won't cry quits quite so soon as this," Bob replied quickly. "Joe, drive a stake where Harry stands, so we can find the spot ag'in, an' then get ready to start on the other course."

When this had been done Bob brought the compass forward once more, and Joe struck out southeast by east—a direction which caused them to return almost over the same course, the stake standing at the point of an acute angle.

This second course was but little more than one-quarter the distance of the first; but the underbrush was more tangled, which made the labor of clearing a path proportionately greater, and it was nearly night-fall when Joe shouted, as he pressed on in advance:

"There's no need of squinting across that compass-box any longer, for here's the coral-head as plain as the nose on a man's face!"

Without thinking that by leaving their positions all this last portion of the work might have to be repeated, the boys rushed forward eagerly despite Bob's warning shouts; and thus deserted by his assistants, the old sailor could do no less than join the

others, who were standing around what looked like a dull-white rock of the same form as that so rudely pictured on the time-stained paper.

"I reckon we've struck it!" he said with a long-drawn sigh of relief; "but there's likely to be a big lot of diggin', an' it's gettin' late. My idee is that we'd better knock off now, an' come back in the mornin'."

Joe was of the same opinion, and the two men began to gather up their belongings preparatory to a return to the steamer.

The boys were decidedly disappointed. Even though all were very hungry, they would have preferred to settle the question then and there regardless of the amount of time that might be necessary; but as their views on the subject were not asked for, there was no other course open save to follow the leaders.

The coral-head lay nearer the water's edge than did the hut, and after blazing two or three trees and ascertaining the bearings of the supposed treasure, the line of march was taken up.

The sun had been below the horizon fully a quarter of an hour when they stepped on board the Sea Bird, and not until then did the boys realize how tired they were. The exertion even of cooking supper seemed too great; but it was a task which must be performed, and all hands aided in it, thus bringing the meal to a much earlier close than if Jim had officiated at the stove alone.

It is safe to say that none of the steamer's crew

were troubled with wakefulness five minutes after retiring, and Bob himself was wrapped in slumber when the sun came up out of the sea. His eyes were opened at a reasonably early hour, however, and when a hurried breakfast had been eaten the party set out for the spot where all believed a pirate's treasure would be found.

To retrace their steps by the course laid out on the previous evening was not a difficult matter, for the trail through the tangled underbrush would have showed the way even without the compass, and before two hours of this new day were spent the little party stood once more around the coral-head.

Owing to the fact that they had but one shovel the work of digging progressed slowly, and it was soon discovered that the task would require considerable time. The coral was of great size, very much larger at the base than the top, and imbedded in the sand to the depth of at least four feet.

"We must spell each other every five minutes," Bob said, as he set the example by taking the tool from Joe's hands. "In that way we shall get along faster, because the one who's diggin' will always be fresh."

Each of the party, including the boys, had taken his turn at the shovel half a dozen times when the huge mass of coral was finally uncovered, and then came the question of removing it entirely.

To this end Joe cut three poles, to be used as levers, and with the most intense excitement depicted on every countenance the treasure-seekers set about this last portion of the task.

The second attempt was successful. The coral was rolled up on the sand until it could be toppled over, and then, as Bob scraped the earth away from where it had rested so long, an oblong sheet of metal—apparently copper—was exposed to view.

This was sufficient proof for the boys that the paper found in the hollow log referred to a hoard of gold, and they cheered again and again until all three were hoarse, while Bob said in a tone of mingled amazement and joy:

"I'm blest if I thought the dockerment was anything more'n a bloomin' hoax; but this begins to look as if there might be a heap of truth in it, even if them as wrote the story was mighty bad hands with a pen."

Despite all their anxiety to know what had been hidden in this place, the little party stood around the excavation in a frame of mind very much resembling awe until Joe said, impatiently:

"Come, come! What's the sense of standing like images? Let's know what there is here, now that we're pretty near the end of the puzzle!"

This was sufficient to awaken the treasure-seekers from their daze, and the work was continued without further delay.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TREASURE.

THE SHEET of metal, which was about eight feet square and half an inch in thickness, covered considerable more space than had the base of the coral-head, consequently it became necessary to work some time longer with the shovel before it could be raised.

After the edges were exposed, and the sand had been thrown back to prevent any chance of its falling in and burying whatever might be beneath when the metal was removed, Bob said in a tone of caution, curbing his own excitement as much as possible:

"Keep cool, lads, for too great speed jes' now may make no end of extra work. Joe, you take hold of this 'ere plate with me, while Jim stands by with the shovel in case we start the sand a runnin'. Don't let your hopes climb so high that you'll be disappointed if we fail to find anything here, my hearties, for there's a good many chances somebody has been at this place ahead of us, an' we'll have all our labor for nothin'. Calm down same's I am, an' then there won't be any harm done if we find nothin' but an empty hole."

Bob's advice was good, but he did not follow it himself. Now they were so near the end of the task, he was actually trembling with suppressed excitement, and it was as if he had made this long speech for the purpose of quieting his own nerves.

The boys stood around the excavation awaiting impatiently the moment when the secret was to be revealed; and although Jim held the shovel ready to check any flow of sand, it was apparent that he paid more heed to what might be under the metal plate than the duty assigned him.

To raise the heavy covering was more difficult than the old sailor at first supposed. Four times did he and Joe make the attempt unsuccessfully, and then, as every muscle was strained to the utmost, it canted on edge, while five pairs of eyes peered eagerly into what was naturally supposed to be an excavation.

If the anxious ones had expected an immediate view of treasure they were disappointed. A mass of what appeared to be canvas, but so discolored and decayed as to require a close scrutiny before such fact could be determined, was all that could be seen, and this in itself cheered Bob wonderfully.

"Whatever was buried is still here, for if anybody had got at it they wouldn't a' taken the trouble to cover the hole over again. All hands turn to an' lift this chunk of metal out of the way."

"An' don't be two or three hours about it either," Jim cried impatiently, as he grasped one side of the huge plate, "or we'll never find out what's under the canvas."

The additional excitement lent strength to every arm, and as if it had been nothing more than a piece of wood the heavy mass was rolled end over end until it lay on the sand a dozen feet from the excavation.

When this had been done there was no longer any delay in continuing the investigation. With one accord every member of the party seized at the same moment the discolored covering which hid from view the secret of the key. The fabric crumbled in their hands like tinder, and instead of lifting it off readily each pulled up a small quantity of moldering fiber.

"Take the shovel!" Bob cried excitedly to Joe. "This stuff hasn't got much more substance than dust, an' it must be scraped away carefully."

"It's a bad lookout for what may be beneath," Joe replied grimly, as he obeyed the order while the boys and Bob worked with their hands until a black, stiff surface was exposed.

"This is tarred canvas, an' by gettin' hold of the edges we can lift it out, I reckon," the old sailor said; and as the others followed his example the second covering, together with the remaining fragments of the first, was raised without difficulty, exposing to view a sight well calculated to increase the already feverish excitement.

An excavation about five feet square, dug down to the bed-rock and lined on the sides with tarred canvas, was revealed, while in it, packed with a view to economy of space, were a large number of small,

black bags full to plumpness of something which bulged here and there like metal.

Bob drew his sheath-knife in a twinkling, and instead of cutting the mouth of a bag which he lifted from its long resting-place, slit it down the side, allowing the contents to drop in a dull yellow shower on the sand.

"Talk about wantin' salvage on the brig!" he cried; "why, here's more money than she and her cargo would fetch in any port! It's gold, lads! Here's a Spanish doubloon; this is an English sovereign; an' there's a Dutch piece. It would puzzle a lawyer to count it off-hand; but we oughter be satisfied at knowin' that every coin is good, lawful money, no matter how them as put their fists to the dockerment may a' got it"!

Bob was almost beside himself with joy, and the others were not one whit more calm. Each had torn or cut open a bag, and was handling the contents as if every touch of the precious metal gave pleasure. That the hoard was valuable every member of the party knew beyond a doubt, even though no one could compute the actual amount. There were coins of almost every nation, some of gold, others of silver, all poured into the tarred canvas bags without any attempt at classification, but simply that they might be in a portable shape.

The bag Harry opened contained, in addition to the money, several rings; but in the excitement of the moment there was no thought of examining them critically. It was sufficient that they were in

possession of a large amount of treasure; the value of the find was a secondary consideration just then.

The old sailor finally aroused himself from what can be called by no other name than a delirium of joy, and with his awakening to the reality came that which the accumulation of wealth always brings—fear lest it should be lost as suddenly as it was gained.

"We mustn't sit here crowin' like idiots!" he cried sharply as he began to gather up the gold-pieces which had fallen on the ground. "There's no tellin' how soon somebody may come, an' if we want to hold what we've got it's time things around here were put into shape. These bags must be carried on board the Sea Bird, an' the hole filled in ag'in, so's no one will know we've been diggin'!"

This suggestion started the remainder of the party into activity, and on the instant all were ready to set about the necessary work.

It was now high noon. The rays of the sun beat down upon the sand with a heat that under any other circumstances would have seemed overpowering; but the treasure-finders heeded it not. The foliage shut out every breath of air, and the shadows cast by the trees were but so many stifling spots free only from the glare of the sand; yet no one hesitated to begin the laborious task, because the burdens were golden. Over all had come the fear that this new-found treasure might be wrested from them, and hunger or thirst, fatigue or exhaustion were alike forgotten.

"A couple of bags are as much as Joe an' me can carry, while one will be a load for you boys; but in three turns we'll have them all at the boat; so let's get under way at once," Bob said as he set the example, while the others obeyed silently.

No one speculated as to why so much gold had been buried in that particular spot, or how it happened that those who concealed the treasure had abandoned the rich hoard. The wonderful fact of its having come into their possession was the only thought which could be entertained.

The burdens, as allotted by Bob, were reasonably heavy, and despite the excitement which lent fictitious strength, the journey to the boat occupied considerably more than half an hour.

Joe and Bob scanned the horizon in every direction before depositing the first load of treasure to return for the second, but as no sail was in sight on the dazzling blue waters it was believed safe to leave the precious bags on the beach during the hour they would necessarily be absent.

On the third trip neither Harry nor Walter carried a load. There were originally but nineteen packages in the excavation, as was shown by careful count, and since the two boys showed more signs of weariness than the others, Bob insisted that both travel empty-handed.

When the tired party arrived at the beach with the last of the gold the boat was launched, the bags distributed evenly fore and aft, and with Joe and Bob rowing, the return to the steamer was begun.

The movement of the yawl caused a light breeze which greatly refreshed the heated treasure-seekers, and with the relief thus afforded came speculation as to why so much wealth had been concealed on the key.

"I reckon them as signed that 'ere dockerment were reg'lar pirates," Bob said in reply to a question from Harry. "It ain't likely honest folks would 'a' put the stuff there when it could easier have been carried somewhere else."

"But why did they leave it?" Harry persisted. "From the looks of the hut it's been a good many years since anybody lived there, and of course the gold was buried when that was built."

"Most likely the whole crowd are dead—killed in a fight—or we wouldn't 'a' hit on sich a find. Howsomever, it don't make much difference to us, seein' that we've got the pile. Look lively when we reach the steamer, lads, an' put the bags aboard in a hurry, for there's another trip ashore to be made before sunset."

"What for?" Jim asked in surprise.

"We must cover that hole up as it was when we found it, so's in case anybody stumbles over the place before the Sea Bird is ready to leave there won't be any suspicion as to what has been taken out. Joe an' me will 'tend to that part of it while you boys cook dinner."

By this time the yawl was close alongside the steamer. Jim was in the bow, and as the rowers held her steady he leaped aboard with the painter.

In accordance with Bob's orders Harry and Walter clambered over the steamer's rail, and stood ready to take the bags as they were passed up.

"Stow 'em in the hold behind the water-casks," the old sailor said when the last valuable package was on board, "an' see to that part of it before doin' anything else."

Then he and Joe rowed slowly back to the shore while the boys carried the treasure below.

It was difficult for them to realize, even though they had such good proof, that all this weight was made up of gold coin; and Jim, who was more boisterous than any other member of that highly excited crew, insisted on opening every bag before stowing it away.

There was nothing to interfere with such diversion, for Bob and Joe would necessarily be absent a long while, and each package was duly inspected.

Harry wanted to count the money in one bag in order to get some idea of the total amount; but he was forced to abandon the task after a few moments' work. There were apparently coins of every nation, the majority of which the boys could only make a rough guess as to the value; and Jim said, when Harry announced his inability to arrive at even an approximate computation:

"Never mind, fellers; we can weigh the whole lot when we get into port, an' then figger up somewhere near what it's worth. I'd jes' like to spread these all over the deck, where we could see 'em every minute; but I s'pose Bob would kick."

"He'd have good reason," Harry said laughingly. "Besides bein' in the way, it wouldn't be safe to have so much gold around, for there's no knowing how soon some other craft may come into the cove."

"All the same I'd like to see it on deck," Jim replied; and then, as if it required a mighty effort to put this desire far from him, he bustled to and fro in the most energetic fashion.

After this work had been done, the amateur cook and his assistants went into the galley, where all the stores were overhauled in order that a most elaborate meal might be prepared; for despite the heat and his fatigue, Jim was determined to make of the dinner a regular Thanksgiving feast, to celebrate their rare good fortune.

CHAPTER XXII.

FROM JOY TO DISMAY.

IT WAS nearly sunset, and Jim's feast had been ready for the table fully an hour when Bob and Joe came out of the thicket and launched the boat once more.

The boys, who were on deck watching for their return, could see that both the men were nearly exhausted. They rowed as if it was a great exertion even to lift the oars, and on reaching the steamer sat in the yawl some time before coming aboard.

"You'd better hurry!" Jim said warningly. "I've had a swell dinner ready so long that it must be pretty nigh dried up by this time, an' if you fool 'round much more everything will taste like chips!"

"I couldn't hurry, lad, if a month's grub rolled together was waitin for me," Bob said as he mopped his sun-burned face with his shirt-sleeve. "That last job was a tough one, an' I feel as though all the marrow in my bones was toasted brown. This 'ere's the only shady place with any air stirrin' we've found since mornin', an' I mean to scoop in all the comfort I can for the next half-hour."

Joe was equally as unwilling to move from the side of the tug, where slight but cooling draughts

of air afforded the long-needed relief from intense heat, and Jim's feast was but little more than a cold lunch when the weary ones were ready to sit at the table in the stuffy cabin.

Bob exerted himself but once more that night after the meal was finished, and then he went below to make sure the treasure had been stowed according to his directions.

It was yet light when the tired crew stretched themselves on the mattresses which had been spread under the awning aft, and although there was such a fruitful topic, but little conversation was indulged in, because slumber came so quickly.

But however tired Jim was, he could not refrain from speaking of the treasure they had so unexpectedly found.

"What are you fellers goin' to do with your share of the gold?" he asked in a low tone, to avoid being overheard by Joe or Bob.

"Give it to father, I suppose," Harry replied, displaying but little enthusiasm because of his weariness.

"You can bet I'll keep what comes to me right in my own trousers-pocket!" Master Libby replied very decidedly. "I'm goin' to buy a vessel like the Mary Walker, an' make a voyage fishin' all by myself!"

"But you'll have to take a crew," Walter suggested with a yawn.

"Of course I'll have somebody to do the work an' stand watch; but I'll be the boss, an' won't so much

as go on deck when it rains! I'll have a heavin'-line in my pocket, so's to whale the cook if the grub ain't first-class! I tell you the crew'll have to jump 'round when I'm aboard, or there'll be fun!"

"I should think you had enough of that kind of work when those men were aboard," Harry said after a pause.

"Well, you see I want to take my turn at floggin' once in a while, so's to know what it's like. I haven't had a chance yet; but I will when we get this money home."

Neither Harry nor Walter made any reply to this rather cruel project, and in the silence which followed they soon fell asleep, leaving Jim his choice of indulging in more air-castles or that of benefiting by their example.

The first rays of the rising sun failed to awaken them next morning, and all hands might have slept a good portion of the forenoon if Jim had not been aroused by a sensation of numbness in his arm, caused by the fact that Harry had unconsciously used it as a pillow.

"It's early yet, an' I reckon I'd better take one more nap instead of callin' the other fellers," he muttered to himself as he sat bolt upright an instant for the purpose of restoring the circulation of blood to his misused limb.

As he did this, however, mechanically glancing seaward, he saw that which drove from his eyelids all desire for sleep.

A boat had just come into view from around the

northern point of the cove, and was heading directly toward the steamer, rowed by two men who looked strangely familiar, although for a moment he could not clearly distinguish their features.

"Bob! Bob!" he cried in a low tone as he shook the unconscious sailor. "There's a yawl comin' in here, an' I believe ——"

He did not finish the sentence, for Joe was on his feet by this time, and cried, before Jim could speak another word:

"I'm a Dutchman if that red-nosed villain an' the Mexican haven't come back! What deviltry are they up to, I wonder?"

Now the remainder of the crew were awake and peering out over the rail at the rapidly-approaching boat, the occupants of which could be clearly distinguished as two of the party for whom those on the schooner from Nassau were in search.

"What are we to do?" Joe asked in a whisper. "They mustn't be allowed to come on board or we may have trouble in getting rid of them; and, besides, I don't fancy being shipmates with murderers."

"Of course they can't come over the rail," Bob replied angrily. "Bring anything on deck that will serve in the place of weapons, an' we'll keep them at a distance. It's only two against two—without countin' the boys—an' I reckon we can hold our own!"

Just as Joe disappeared inside the engine-room the new-comers, having arrived within thirty or

forty yards of the steamer, ceased rowing, as he with the red nose shouted:

"Ahoy, on the tug!"

"What do you want?" Bob asked gruffly.

"We've come to make a trade! The brig is aground on the shoal to the nor'ard of here, an' things shall be made fair an' square if you'll help us float her. I'll come aboard, where we can talk comfortable-like."

"That's exactly what you won't do while I've got strength enough to break your head!"

"Now don't get grumpy over the little trick we played," the man said, in a wheedling tone.

"Do you call it nothin' but a trick to steal a vessel an' leave five of us on a disabled tug, after we'd done what we could to keep you from starvin'?" Bob shouted fiercely.

"We knew there was plenty of grub aboard; you couldn't 'a' handled both crafts, so what we did was only dividin' things up. The Bonita is stranded now, an' will go to pieces in the first gale if you can't fix the tug to tow her off. We'll ——"

"The steamer couldn't be repaired in a month; but if she was in workin' order we wouldn't raise a hand toward savin' the brig while you were on board!"

As Bob ceased speaking Joe came on deck with four lengths of iron pipe, each about three feet long, and the old sailor seized one of these with a look of exultation as he said to his companions:

"I reckon they won't get over the rail while we can swing sich a handy club as this!"

"They may have fire-arms," Joe suggested.

"That ain't very likely, or they'd 'a' set us ashore ten minutes after we took 'em off the key."

During this short conversation the two men were whispering together, and as the old sailor ceased speaking, he with the red nose cried, in a threatening tone:

"You sea-lawyers want to be mighty careful with your tongues, or there'll be trouble. I've come here to make a fair trade, an' you'd better listen to it. We'll help repair the tug, an' give up an equal share of the brig if you'll turn to with us an' get her off the shoal."

"We wouldn't lift a finger if she was sinking with all three of you on board!" Joe shouted, unable to remain silent any longer. "There's been a schooner up here from Nassau since that *trick*, as you call it, was played on us, and if her crew ever get hold of your crowd it won't make any difference whether the Bonita goes to pieces or floats!"

For an instant the two men sat motionless and silent, staring at the engineer as if stupefied by the information; and then the one with the red nose cried hoarsely, as he shook his fist in impotent rage:

"We was willin' to give you a fair show, an' do our share toward repairin' the steamer; but if that can't be done, look out for squalls. We'll pull the brig off the shoals; and, what's more, it will be done with that steamer!"

"Come an' take her!" Bob cried derisively. "You've got to get rid of us first, then repair the

machinery, an' afterwards learn to run it. By that time I reckon there'll be more gray hairs in your heads than there are now!"

The angry man looked at the old sailor an instant as if about to make another threat, and then, evidently changing his mind, he spoke a few words to his companion, after which the two began to row leisurely toward the shore.

The crew of the Sea Bird watched them in silence until the boat's bow grated on the sand, and as the men left her to go into the woods, Joe said:

"If we worked lively it might be possible to tow that yawl out here before they knew what was being done. Then those two would be harmless, an' the one they've left on the brig wouldn't be able to do much mischief alone."

"It could be done, I s'pose," Bob replied, thoughtfully; "but I'd rather let 'em go away than stay so near.

"But we shall have to be on guard all the time, for no one knows when they'll make an attempt to steal this steamer."

"I can't see that we should be as well off to coop 'em up on the island. We've got to take in a supply of water from there before it'll be safe to leave the harbor, an' they'd interfere with sich a job mightily."

This was a view of the case which Joe had entirely overlooked, and it was sufficient to show the folly of his hastily-formed plan.

"They may try to stave our boat when they come

back," Jim suggested. "It could be done before we'd have a chance to stop 'em."

"There's some truth in that, lad," Bob replied, quickly. "It won't do any harm to take her out of the water, so jump in an hook on the falls."

When the yawl was hoisted inboard all hands seemed to realize that an encounter was extremely probable, even though the murderers could gain but little advantage in getting possession of a disabled steamer, and they gathered around Bob to learn what measures for defence he had to propose.

"It's certain they won't try any game until the other man is here," he said after a long pause, during which he scrutinized the shore closely, "an' we'd better get ready for a fight. Jim, you an' Harry cook breakfast. Walter is to go on watch, and Joe an' I'll set about the work. Now that there is so much treasure aboard we must push the repairs for all we're worth."

When the two cooks went below and the sentry took up his position in the pilot-house, Bob began making such preparations for defence as were possible with the limited means at his command. The pieces of iron pipe were laid near the rail aft, where they could be most conveniently reached; the boat-hook and oars were taken from the yawl that they might be ready for use, and then the old sailor brought on deck the largest rocks he could find among the ballast.

"There's about a dozen below that'll weigh ten or fifteen pounds apiece," he said grimly in reply to

Joe's question of what he intended to do with such primitive weapons. "One of 'em would make some disturbance if it struck a boat's plankin' below the rail inside, an' I reckon we can pitch 'em pretty true if the villains should be foolish enough to make an attack."

By the time the steamer had been put in a state of defence Jim announced that breakfast was ready, and the two men went below while the cook and Walter stood guard to give an alarm at the first appearance of the enemy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PREPARATIONS.

WHILE it was not possible that those who had stolen the Bonita could gain possession of the tug so long as her crew exercised ordinary care, nor probable that they would make any very desperate effort to do so in her disabled condition, every precaution was taken for the defense of the steamer and the safety of the treasure.

Immediately after breakfast Bob, Joe and Harry went into the hold, and the work of stowing the bags among the ballast where it would escape observation was begun.

The gravel and rocks were first dug away until the keelson was exposed, and on this timber the gold was packed, after which everything was replaced as before, leaving the bags buried to the depth of six or eight inches. The hoard was thus hidden so securely that there was little chance that it would be found unless the searchers had positive information of its being on board.

This work was hardly finished when Walter came below with the information that the two men were leaving the key, and Bob and Joe hurried on

deck, for it was by no means certain some demonstrations against the steamer would not be made.

In this, however, they were happily mistaken. Neither he with the red nose nor the Mexican had any idea of trusting their precious bodies within reach of possible harm; but they stopped the boat fifty or sixty yards away while the leader shouted:

"Do you still say that you won't lift a hand toward helpin' the brig off the shoal?"

"There's nothin' we're able to do," Bob replied. "The tug is as useless as a raft, an' it'll be three weeks at the very soonest before the screw can be turned. I'm willin', though, to say we wouldn't help you if we could, so it's no use to do any chinnin'!"

The red-nosed man appeared to think that some vent for his anger was absolutely necessary, and he catered to this feeling by shaking his fist threateningly, after which the two rowed out of the cove.

"I don't reckon them kind of monkey-shines will do us much harm," Bob said philosophically as he walked slowly aft to where Joe had recommenced his long task of repairing the engine, as if time was too precious to be wasted on such villains as those in the boat.

"If they're wise we sha'n't see so much as their noses again," the engineer said. "This craft wouldn't be of any service if we should offer to give her up, and the scoundrels ought to be in too much of a hurry to leave the vicinity, where the schooner from Nassau may put in at any moment, to waste much time on spite-work!"

"I reckon you're about right; but at the same time, it stands us in hand to be ready if they should take it into their ugly heads to kick up a row. After we've made sure they're really gone I'll take two of the boys ashore an' bring off a cask of water. It's got to be done before we can leave, an' now's as good a time as any."

There was nothing the remainder of the crew could do to help Joe, however disposed they might be for the task, and he made no objection to the plan.

The yawl was lowered, an empty cask put on board, and, with Harry in the stern-sheets, Bob and Jim pulled the little craft out toward the open water until it was possible to see the enemy fully a mile away as they rowed around the key.

"We're all right now," Bob said after one glance at the two men. "There's no chance of them villains getting back before we fill the cask; so head her for the shore, lad."

It was a difficult job to get the water-butt, after it had been filled, from the spring to the boat, and the forenoon was well-nigh spent when the task had been accomplished. The only thing in the laborers' favor was the fact that the sun no longer sent down such fervent rays upon the parched land. At about ten o'clock clouds began to gather, and had continued to do so until the entire heavens were covered as by a veil, much to Bob's disquietude.

"There's more than rain in them, lads," he said with an ominous shake of the head when they

emerged from the thicket with the unwieldy burden. "If I ain't 'way out of my reckonin' we'll get a capful of wind from the east before mornin', an' the Sea Bird stands a slim chance of keepin' off the shore."

"With both anchors down I don't see how any harm can come to her, no matter how much of a gale we have," Harry replied as he gazed toward the trim little steamer, which was moored so securely bow and stern.

"I'm afeared you'll have a chance of seein' how it can be done. This sandy bottom ain't the best holdin'-ground for an anchor, an' once she begins to drag nothin' can stop her. Howsomever," he added in a more cheerful tone, "we needn't croak till the trouble comes; but it's best to get aboard lively an' make preparations for a dirty night. It won't take much of a wind to knock the brig to pieces if she's on the outer edge of the shoal, so we can reckon on that red-nosed villain an' his mates comin' ashore about sunset."

It was necessary for the rowers to exert all their skill and strength on the oars to prevent the yawl from being swamped during the return to the steamer. Already had the sea begun to rise, and the white-capped waves which now beat heavily against the shore gave token of what force they would exert when roused to fury by the east wind, which was causing the trees to wave helplessly to and fro against the gray sky.

The little boat was loaded to the gunwales, and

despite every effort the green water rushed in over the rail very often, much to Harry's alarm. By pulling around to the starboard bow of the steamer, where they would be partially sheltered from both wind and wave, it was possible to get the heavy cask on board without mishap, after which the yawl was hooked on the falls and hoisted up; otherwise she would speedily have been stove to pieces against the larger craft.

"It looks as if we were to have a bad night," Joe said when the work was finished and all hands went aft once more.

"The worst we could have," Bob replied gloomily. "The chances are the steamer will be driven ashore, and there's no question about those villains leaving the brig; so unless this wind takes a different slant before sunset we can count on bein' penned up on the island with them as jolly companions. But we can't afford to moon 'round very long tellin' what's goin' to happen, for there's plenty of work to be done. The awnin' must be taken down an' the cables overhauled."

Then he called for the boys to "bear a hand," and soon all were busily preparing for what was apparently the inevitable.

By the time the deck had been cleared and everything made snug the Sea Bird was dancing about like a cork, flinging the spray fore and aft as she came up on the cables with a thud that caused the timbers to creak, or plunging her bow under until the deck was awash.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the gale was full upon them, coming directly out of the east, and so furiously did the little craft toss and pitch that Bob took the precaution of stretching life-lines fore and aft. The cables had been slackened to give plenty of scope; but she overrode the bow anchor until one would have fancied, from the savage jerks which the steamer gave, that it had been hove short.

There was no thought of cooking. Jim could hardly have remained on his feet in the galley, for the swell was shorter and more violent than it would have been on the open ocean; therefore the anxious ones were forced to eat dry ship's-biscuit with the poor consolation in mind that before morning all their stores might be at the bottom of the sea.

The boys were in the pilot-house, where they could have a view of all that was going on and yet be in a position to render immediate assistance if it was needed. Joe and Bob remained on deck despite the spray which fell like rain; and the former said to the old sailor toward night, as he made his way forward after great difficulty:

"We can get some pleasure out of the fact that the men haven't come ashore from the brig. There's no chance of their making harbor in the teeth of this wind, and we can count on having got rid of them."

"That's where you make a mistake, my hearty. They most likely landed two or three hours ago, runnin' down the western shore, where they'd find sheltered water. Them men ain't fools if they are

villains, an' by noon knowed the brig couldn't hold together much longer. The chances are she was bilged two hours ago, an' has gone to pieces by this time."

Joe went aft again, looking more disconsolate than ever. He had felt positive the enemy had not abandoned the vessel, and his disappointment was all the greater because this hope had been so strong.

When the gray light of day gave place to the darkness of night the anchors still held; but the steamer was laboring so much on account of the bow hawser that Bob decided it would be necessary to shift the strain, despite the danger attendant upon such an undertaking.

"All hands on deck!" he shouted at the door of the pilot-house, adding warningly, as the boys crept out, "keep a firm hold of the life-lines, lads, for he who falls overboard will stand a poor chance of saving himself."

To make the proposed change it was necessary to carry the cable astern after it was cast off the bitt, for all the slack had long since been let out, and rapidity of movement was as essential as strength.

"Wait till she buries her nose once more, an' then rush when she rises," Bob shouted as he threw off two or three turns of the rope.

Up, up the little craft rose as the great green waves swept beneath, and then when the hawser checked her and the fall began, the signal was given:

"All hands with a will now!" the old sailor

shouted; and in an instant the crew were rushing madly aft, the heavy cable nearly dragging them from their feet.

Bob had been correct as to the precise time when this maneuver should be executed; but he failed to give due consideration to the force the under-tow would exert in such shoal water. The hawser had but just been loosened from the bitt when the drag of the waters began. All hands clung with a force born of desperation; but their efforts were vain.

A crew of giants could not have resisted the strain upon the wet, iron-like rope, and Bob shouted wildly when he was almost at the taffrail:

"Let go! For your lives let go!"

Fortunately this order was obeyed before any one had been injured in the rush, and as the hawser disappeared over the stern Joe muttered half to himself, but so loud that Harry could distinguish the words:

"We've done all we could to wreck the little craft. It would have been better to let her labor with the risk of chafing the rope apart, rather than deliberately throw one anchor away when two hardly held her!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ASHORE.

THE rain, which was now falling in torrents, the driving surf, and the pitching of the steamer, all served to make it difficult to keep one's footing on the slippery planks, and Jim motioned his companions to follow him into the pilot-house, for now that the hawser had been swallowed up by the waves their services were no longer required outside.

"Stay on deck!" Bob cried, as he saw them moving away, and forced to shout at the full strength of his lungs in order to make himself heard above the roar of the tempest. "In case she strikes you must be where there's a chance of savin' your lives. Get under the lee of the house for'ard, an' hold on for all you're worth!"

After some considerable difficulty the boys succeeded, by working along the life-lines, in reaching the bow, where, partially protected by the pilot-house, it was possible to remain in comparative shelter.

"Do you think the tug will be wrecked, Jim?" Harry asked.

"I reckon she'll drive ashore."

"Then we shall be no better off than if we hadn't

found the pirates' gold, for of course it'll all be lost."

"Not unless she goes to pieces!" Jim replied in a decidedly shaky voice; and then, as if this subject was an unpleasant one, he changed it by asking, without any idea the question would be answered:

"What's Bob doin' aft so long? He can't expect to pick up that hawser ag'in, an' it's more dangerous there than here!"

"He's coming now," Walter replied as he crept to the corner of the house; and at the same instant that a huge wave rolled inboard, sweeping the decks with almost irresistible violence, the old sailor and Joe appeared, literally working their way hand over hand by means of the life-line.

Arriving under the lee of the pilot-house they halted, and waited in silence for the shock which should tell that the Sea Bird had been forced into shoal water.

This unpleasant information was not long delayed. The little steamer pitched and plunged more violently than before, but without the sickening motion of being dragged under, which was apparent when the bow anchor held, and after ten minutes of this wild tossing she lurched forward suddenly as if the screw had been set in motion.

"Hold on for your lives!" Bob shouted, and a moment later the tug struck heavily, with such force that but for the timely warning more than one of the crew would have been hurled forward.

All hands waited with bated breath for the suc-

ceeding shocks which would tell that she was pounding herself to pieces on the sand; but much to their surprise nothing of the kind was felt.

"The stern anchor is holding her down!" Bob shouted to Joe, and the words were hardly spoken when the water dashed forward, flooding the decks even with the rail.

"We'll be drowned here in short order!" Joe cried as he struggled toward the boys. "Get into the pilot-house, if you can, for the danger is less there while the decks are being swept!"

Fortunately for all hands the door opened at the top of a short flight of stairs above the level of the rail, and this the engineer succeeded in opening by watching his opportunity between the heavy waves. Harry and Walter gained this shelter before the sea rushed forward again, and at the next interval of comparative quiet the remainder of the party joined them.

It was now possible to converse without actually shouting, and Joe was eager to understand why the tug remained immovable when in the ordinary course of events she should be beating herself to pieces on the shoal.

"The anchor slipped enough to let her drive ahead a bit," Bob said, in explanation, "an' then brought up just as she struck. You'll most likely find the hawser taut as an iron bar; and that, together with the hold the sand has got on her nose, keeps everything firm."

"And if the anchor should give way once more she'd break up?"

"There's no doubt about that; but I've got an idee the wind hasn't got as much force as it had half an hour ago. If the timbers will stand that poundin' astern there's a chance of our gettin' outer this scrape after all. even though things do look so tough."

It was but natural that all hands should devote their entire attention to ascertaining if the gale really was abating, since this was their only hope, and when another half-hour had elapsed the question was decided. The seas still beat against the stranded steamer with the same violence, but the rain had nearly ceased, and the wind no longer howled around the doomed craft with its former fury.

When this became an assured fact, it was, as nearly as Bob could judge, about midnight; and the weary boys thought with dismay of the many hours which must elapse before they could gain a place of absolute safety.

"Lie down and go to sleep, if you can," the old sailor said, much as if he knew of what they were thinking. "I reckon the worst is over, an' since it's only a question of waitin' you'd best get all the rest possible."

The boys followed this suggestion by curling themselves up on the cushioned locker; and, strange as it may seem, they fell asleep in a very short time despite the howling wind and raging waters. Weariness of body was greater than fear, and even in the midst of deadly dangers they crossed the borders of dreamland.

Bob and Joe kept watch, and as the hours wore on the couriers of the coming dawn dispersed the storm-clouds until the heavens were smiling blue once more, and the waves no longer uplifted their crests in anger.

"There's as big a danger passed as ever sailormen stood face to face with!" Bob said, giving vent to a long-drawn sigh of relief. "The little craft is hard and fast aground, of course; but six hours ago it didn't seem as if anything could save her from goin' to pieces, an' this same crowd here have got a mighty big reason for bein' thankful!"

The decks were yet awash, and would probably continue so for several hours, or until the waters of the tiny harbor had subsided into their former quietude; but it was possible to make one's way fore and aft without danger, as Joe proved when the day had dawned.

All the doors and hatches were securely closed when the gale first sprung up; therefore everything below was in much the same condition as before the storm. There had not water enough entered the seams or crevices to injure the stores, and the hull was comparatively free, as Bob learned on trying the hand-pump.

"I don't reckon we can count on leavin' this key in the Sea Bird," he said as he dropped the lead over the bow. "She has stuck her nose mighty deep in the sand, an' though that cable is strainin' hard astern, there's little chance it will work her off."

"And according to your ideas, those who stole the Bonita are ashore somewhere; so as long as we're obliged to stay here it's safe to say there's a chance of trouble from them?"

"That's about the size of it, my hearty; but they may take a notion to put to sea, for it's likely their boat was cared for after comin' ashore. Howsomever, we won't look trouble in the face before it comes. Let's rouse up the boys an' get breakfast under way, for I'm growin' sharkish."

It is needless to make any attempt at depicting the joy of those in the pilot-house, when they opened their eyes, to see the bright sun smiling and the raging winds subsiding into the gentlest zephyrs that were ever wafted over a coral reef. This decided change was so pleasing that, despite all the trouble which surrounded them, they were very cheerful.

Jim bustled about in the galley as if cooking was the one delight of his life, and while Bob and Joe raised once more the awning to shelter them from the burning rays of the sun, Harry and Walter did their best toward spreading the breakfast-table in such a manner that it would at least look inviting.

The only immediate trouble which might be apprehended was from those who had probably taken refuge on the key, and with this they were confronted much sooner than the most timid expected.

Harry had just come on deck to announce that breakfast was ready, when a shout from the shore caused all hands to glance in that direction, where

could be seen the red-nosed man and his companions emerging from the thicket.

"Halloo!" he shouted in a friendly tone, and without replying Bob held up his hand in token that the hail had been heard.

"The brig has gone to pieces, an' we're here with no chance of leavin' the key," the man continued, much as if giving valuable information.

"Where's the boat? You came ashore in one, I reckon."

"Yes: but she went adrift during the gale."

"If you couldn't take better care of her there's no reason why you shouldn't stay there till the schooner from Nassau puts in here again!" Joe shouted angrily. "We're aground, and likely to remain so; but that's no reason why there should be any communication between us!"

"Will you send us some grub ashore?" the red-nosed man asked after a short pause, during which he stood as if trying to control his anger.

"Not so much as a biscuit if you were hungry; but that can't be, for it isn't likely you put off from the brig without provisions."

"All right!" the man cried with a threatening gesture. "You can do as you please an' we've got the same privilege, so it's a question as to who has the best end of the trade!"

"They thought we might be fools enough to take some grub ashore, when all three of 'em were ready to seize the boat," Bob said, as the men disappeared in the thicket. "It's a case of standin' by with our

weather-eyes liftin', for if their yawl has gone adrift they'll try hard to steal ours. I'll go on watch while the rest of you get breakfast, for the water around the bow ain't so deep but that they can wade out here;" and the old sailor seated himself on the starboard rail as Joe and the boys went into the forward cabin.

CHAPTER XXV.

A SERIOUS LOSS.

JOE STOOD guard in turn while Bob ate his breakfast, the boys setting things to rights in the cabin and galley, and when the old sailor came on deck again the question of what should be done was discussed.

"There ain't much chance we can do anything toward floating the steamer until after the machinery has been repaired," the engineer said, by way of beginning the conversation; "and before that can be done she will have settled so deep in the sand that the screw won't have any effect."

"That's jes' about the way I figger it out," Bob replied, as a troubled look came over his face. "The cable will stop her from workin' ahead; but she'll keep on settlin' jes' the same."

"And if we can't float her there's but one other course to pursue, which is to take to the yawl and run our risk of reaching Nassau."

"There ain't much risk about it. She'll carry all hands an' the gold without crowdin'; an' as for danger, why, bless you, we can make harbor among these keys almost any hour in the day. It's abandonin' a sound craft like this that makes me sore,"

and Bob gave vent to a deep sigh of sorrow or disappointment.

"But if it must be done, the sooner we start the better."

"You're right, Joe, an' it ain't any use to whine about what can't be helped. If that rascally crew weren't ashore we might make one try to float her; but as they are there, an' can't get away very soon, we'd better go to work. If you'll find somethin' that'll answer for a mast, I'll cut the steamer's foresail into a leg-o'-mutton sail for the boat, an' by to-morrow we can make a start."

When the boys came on deck, they were surprised at seeing the two men engaged in rigging the yawl instead of trying to float the Sea Bird; and after the proposed plan had been explained, Jim was thoroughly dissatisfied, although he took good care not to betray such fact to Joe or Bob.

"It's just foolishness to abandon this steamer!" he said to the boys when the three were comparatively alone forward. "We've lost the brig that would have brought in a big lot of money through the salvage, an' now we're goin' to leave the Sea Bird for them murderers!"

"With the gold-pieces we've got in the hold I don't think there's any reason to feel very badly about what might have been made out of the Bonita," Harry said laughingly. "It's a fact that we can't do very much while that crowd on the key stand ready to take every possible advantage, and neither Walter nor I are sorry to go away in the

morning, no matter how much must be left behind."

"Don't you care whether the steamer goes to pieces or not?" Jim asked almost angrily.

"Of course we'd like to save her if it could be done quickly; but we had rather get home than have a dozen tugs just like her, and the sooner the yawl is under way the sooner our parents will know where we are."

"But they must have found out all about it long before this," Jim said calmly

"How could that be?"

"The captain of the schooner promised to report us, an' your fathers have read the whole story in the papers by this time."

"But we can't get home any too soon," Walter said decidedly; and the conversation was brought to an abrupt conclusion as Jim went sulkily into the galley, where, a few minutes later, a terrible clattering of pots and pans told of his displeasure.

There was no slight amount of work to be done before the little party could be ready to abandon the Sea Bird. The journey to Nassau might be a long one because of baffling winds, and plenty of food must be cooked. There were no kegs or small casks aboard, consequently it would be necessary to fill all the bottles and cans with water; and, in addition, Bob and Joe would be occupied a greater portion of the day in rigging the yawl.

The uproar in the galley reminded the old sailor that very much should be done in that quarter, and

the only benefit Master Jim derived from his outburst of ill-temper was such as might be extracted from an order to cook all the grub he could between then and sunset.

During the day nothing was seen of the party on the key. Toward the close of the afternoon a thin thread of smoke, which apparently arose from the western shore, told they were still there, and also that the intimation of a scarcity of food was false.

"They've most likely got more provisions, than we have," Bob said as Joe called his attention to the smoke. "It's safe to say that the boat was loaded with cabin-stores, an' I'll bet a farthing's worth of silver spoons they haven't lost so much as a biscuit."

"Although we have no reason to sympathize with them in any way, I'm glad to know they're not hungry," Joe replied gravely.

Until half an hour before sunset all hands worked industriously, and then the task had been accomplished, with the exception of putting the treasure and stores on board. The yawl was rigged with as much canvas as could safely be carried in a fair sailing breeze, and was made fast alongside ready to receive her cargo when another day should dawn.

"It won't take half an hour to load," Bob said in a tone of satisfaction as he scrutinized the result of his labor, "an' we'll buckle down to stowin' away part of what Jim has cooked to-day. You take the first watch on deck, Joe, for I don't calculate it'll be safe to trust the boys after dark, an' I'll spell you when I'm through supper."

Bob had decided that a vigilant watch must be kept during the night, although he did not believe the enemy would make any demonstrations, and an hour after supper all hands save the engineer "turned in" on mattresses spread under the awning.

At ten o'clock Joe called the old sailor to his trick on deck, and he in turn was aroused at midnight, for the watches were only of two hours' duration.

When Joe came on duty the second time all animate objects appeared to be in a state of the most complete repose. Not a sound could be heard save the musical ripple of waters on the beach or the faint murmur of the night-wind as it sung gently among the foliage.

Owing to the wakefulness and excitement of the previous night, together with the exertions of the day just passed, Joe's eyes were heavy with sleep, and in order to shake off the drowsiness which pressed upon him he paced softly to and fro on the port side of the deck.

It was unfortunate for the Sea Bird's crew that he chose that particular place for a promenade. Had he walked on the starboard side of the house it would have been possible to see by the faint sheen of the waters a small, round object that apparently floated out from the shore directly toward where the yawl was moored.

Perhaps it might have aroused his curiosity, if not his suspicion, and that would have been sufficient to prevent a serious loss.

As it was, however, he continued the promenade, bent only on keeping his eyes open, and the black sphere came nearer and nearer until one could have distinguished the countenance of the Mexican who had assisted in stealing the Bonita.

Slowly but steadily the head advanced, causing hardly a ripple on the water, until it was hidden in the deep shadow cast by the steamer's hull. Then a hand, in which was held an open knife, appeared above the surface as its fellow grasped the yawl's painter.

One quick, noiseless stroke and the rope was severed, after which the head and hands disappeared.

Joe continued to pace the deck ignorant of what was taking place so near him, and inch by inch the yawl drifted toward the shore until fully three-quarters of the distance from the steamer to the key had been traversed, when the form of a man rose out of the water, which at that particular point was not more than three feet deep, and drew her boldly in on the beach.

At two o'clock the engineer awakened Bob to stand what was now a useless watch, and half an hour later all hands were startled into wakefulness by his loud cry:

"The yawl has gone adrift!"

As they sprung to their feet in alarm he drew in the bit of rope that hung loosely from the rail, and after one glance at the severed end said angrily:

"We're nice sailors, we are! Thought the boys couldn't stand watch, an' took the job ourselves

only to have them villains steal the boat from under our noses! This rope has been cut, so there's no chance she went adrift by accident!"

Joe insisted that he did not close his eyes while on duty, and Bob was equally certain that he kept vigilant watch; therefore there was no possibility of ascertaining when the theft had been committed.

"The yawl is gone!" the old sailor said grimly after a long pause, "an' that's all we need to know just now. How she went don't make very much difference; but I'd like to have that red-nosed man within reach of my fist about three minutes!"

This last misfortune seemed a most severe one in the boys' eyes, and for fully a quarter of an hour Jim was nearly speechless from excess of indignation and apprehension.

"It seems like we was never going to get clear of this island," he said in a whisper when Bob and Joe went forward thinking it might be possible to see the stolen boat. "I believe the pirates' gold has something to do with our bad luck, an' I wish we'd never found that letter."

"I don't see why you should feel out of sorts," Harry said in a sorrowful tone. "You were angry because we proposed to abandon the steamer, and now that it's impossible to get away you ought to be contented."

"Stayin' here without a boat to go ashore in is a different thing from bein' able to sail anywhere around the key," Jim replied, and then he relapsed into silence once more.

The conversation between Bob and Joe was no more satisfactory than that carried on by the boys. As a matter of course they had not been able to see the boat, which was now completely hidden in the shadow of the trees, and after straining their eyes in vain for some time the old sailor said, impatiently:

"What's the use of standin' here like fools when we know she's hauled up somewhere along the beach? We'll turn in, an' after sunrise try to think out another plan which will come to the same end this has!"

"I have a mind to swim ashore and settle matters now with those villains!" Joe said angrily.

"You would be the one to get settled, I reckon;" and Bob had so nearly recovered his composure as to laugh at the engineer's expense. "Both of us together wouldn't stand any show, more especially in the night, when they'd have all the advantage. Turn in with the boys, an' I'll stand watch till I'm sleepy."

CHAPTER XXVI.

BOLD THIEVES.

THE OLD sailor remained on duty until the day began to break. The loss of the yawl troubled him more than he cared to say, and this, together with the possibility that she might have been taken during his watch, drove all desire for sleep from his eyes.

When the yellow shafts of light shot up from the eastern sky to herald the approach of dawn he awakened his companions, and while the boys went into the galley to commence the labors of the day, he and Joe stood on the forward-bitt, eagerly scanning the surrounding shore for some signs of the boat.

In this they were not to be disappointed, for as the shadows retreated the yawl stood revealed on the beach at the point where the Sea Bird's crew emerged from the thicket when staggering under the weight of the pirates' gold, and standing near, as if examining their stolen prize, were the three men.

"There's one good thing about it," Bob said grimly. "By losin' our boat we shall get rid of Mr.

Red-nose and his friends, an' I ain't sure but we'll be sellin 'em reasonably cheap."

Joe was so enraged by the sight that he could made no reply, and the old sailor continued half to himself:

"It won't be sich a terrible job, after they've gone, to build a raft that'll carry us ashore, an' p'rhaps the outcome of it'll be our savin' the steamer."

The watchers had not long to wait before it became apparent that the party on shore did not intend to delay their departure.

All three busied themselves with bringing bundles and boxes from the thicket after the survey of the boat was ended, and in less than half an hour the little craft had a full load.

A light breeze came from the west, and after stepping on board it was only necessary to row the yawl a short distance from the shore when the sail filled, causing her to glide slowly toward the open sea.

Bob and Joe watched these maneuvers in silence without heeding Jim's announcement that breakfast was ready, and much to the astonishment of both, the sail was brailed up when the boat reached a point nearly opposite the steamer.

"I'll be blowed if they haven't got the nerve to speak us!" the old sailor exclaimed; and almost at the same moment the red-nosed man shouted, as he raised his hat in mock politeness:

"We're sorry to leave you here aground, and without a tender; but you didn't feel like makin'

any friendly talk to us yesterday mornin', so we had to help ourselves. I had an idee we'd get the best end of the trade if it come to bein' disagreeable!"

"Don't worry about us!" Bob shouted angrily. "We're glad to get rid of you at any price; but my advice is that you give Nassau a pretty wide berth!"

"We should be ungrateful if we did not heed the counsel of those who have rigged the boat for us in such a satisfactory manner!" the Mexican replied with a laugh; and then the sheet was hauled aft once more and the little craft laid on such a course as would bring her close past the southerly point of the harbor.

Bob and Joe remained silent and motionless until the thieves were shut out from view by the land, and then the former said, with an attempt to speak cheerfully:

"That ends 'em, so far as we are concerned, an' its best not to think of the scoundrels ag'in. We've either got to take up our quarters on the island or rig some plan for floatin' the steamer, an' I reckon that'll occupy pretty much all our time. Let's get breakfast, an' then decide what's to be done."

There was no necessity for spending many moments on deliberations when the morning meal had been eaten, for whatever might be done, the first step was to establish communication with the shore, and this Joe proposed to do when he came on deck again.

The thieving crew were nowhere in sight, as

would have been the case had they sailed in almost any other than a southerly direction, and it seemed probable that the yawl had been headed toward Nassau despite the danger the men would incur of being arrested.

"I only hope they'll fool around in the vicinity until that schooner comes back and captures every one!" Joe said in anything rather than a friendly tone, after taking a deliberate survey of such portion of the ocean as could be seen from the tug; and then he added abruptly, as if determined to put all unpleasant thoughts far from his mind, "Now, what about getting on shore, Bob?"

"We must rig up some kind of a raft, I reckon, an' then stretch one of the heavin' lines so's she can be pulled back and forth without too much work."

"Jim, you and Harry overhaul the lines," Joe said as he began to undress; "and while Bob is building the raft I'll swim ashore."

"Don't do it!" the old sailor cried, warningly. "There are too many sharks around these keys to make swimmin' very safe sport!"

"We sha'n't be likely to find them in such shoal water. The boys can stay near the bow, and with all hands on the lookout I don't fancy there'll be much danger," Joe replied carelessly, as he knotted around his waist the line Jim brought."

Then without more ado he leaped overboard; and so shallow was the cove at this point that hardly a dozen strokes were necessary before his feet touched the bottom, and he waded ashore to where a mangrove grew near the edge of the bank.

Around this he fastened the rope, and then returned to the steamer, saying, as he stepped on board:

"The Sea Bird crawled pretty well up on the shoal before the anchor caught."

"Yes," Bob replied sadly; "she's got so much sand under her nose that I'm afraid she'll stay here, unless—which ain't at all likely—some steamer puts in. I was reckonin' on usin' timbers from the bulkhead for a raft; but seein's how there ain't much trouble in gettin' ashore it'll be best for the boys to make one out of tree-trunks while you keep to work on the engine."

"Are you countin' on livin' ashore?" Jim asked, anxiously.

"We may be glad to, lad, if another gale springs up. We'll be ready to abandon the little steamer if the worst comes; but all hands are to work tryin' to float her jes' the same as if we believed it could be done."

The boys were not loath to be on the land once more. They undressed with alacrity, after bringing from below the axes and hatchets, and with their clothes packed in an empty cask from out of which one of the heads had been taken, they leaped overboard like a party of frogs.

"Cut about twenty medium-sized trees, and drag them to the beach after trimming off the branches!" Joe shouted as they landed.

The boys dressed quickly, for the swarms of mosquitoes rendered clothes very necessary, and at

once set about the task of chopping, selecting such mangroves and palms as grew nearest the shore, in order to avoid, so far as possible, the labor of hauling them through the thick underbrush.

Then Bob and Joe began their portion of the labor. Although the old sailor believed the tug to be immovably fixed upon the sand, he did not propose to neglect anything which would tend to extricate her. Of course it was possible something might occur to better her condition; and in such an improbable event it was necessary she should be in working order. Besides, as he said to Joe, "it was as well to have a job on hand to occupy their attention as to idle the time away on the key."

By noon the boys had collected sufficient materials for the raft, and Bob swam ashore to assist in building it.

Using ropes and vines instead of nails, which were very precious just then, quite a serviceable raft was put together, and on it, by the aid of the rope Joe had stretched ashore, all hands pulled themselves out to the steamer.

The boys went into the galley to prepare dinner, and after it had been eaten the weary crew indulged in a long siesta, for the heat was almost overpowering.

There was no thought of standing watch, now their enemies had left the island, and everybody gave himself up to the desire for slumber which made his eyelids heavy. No one was sleeping very soundly, and Bob had only fallen into a doze, when

a report as loud as would have been caused by the discharge of a musket rang out on the still air, causing boys and men to leap to their feet in alarm.

"What was it?" Joe asked, as he gazed around in bewilderment, but without seeing any living thing either on the sea or land.

"I'm blest if I know!" Bob replied, in a tone of perplexity. "It sounded close aboard; but how can —— Say, is there anything below which could explode?"

"Not when there's no steam on."

The old sailor stood staring at the shore in silence, evidently seriously disturbed, and the three boys gathered around him in alarm. They had experienced so much which was both mysterious and terrible since the morning of the sail in the Sally Walker, that to them every unusual sound or movement meant further disaster, and Bob's palpable fear caused something very like horror to come upon them.

Joe had mechanically started forward, and before reaching the pilot-house he shouted, to the intense relief of all:

"We were more scared than hurt this time! It was only the heaving-line. It has parted, and in doing so made the noise; but I don't understand how there could be so much strain."

Bob glanced ashore quickly, assured himself that one end of the rope was still made fast to the tree, and then cried triumphantly as he pointed astern:

"There's where the strain came from! The sun

has been dryin' the hawser till it pulled the tug back far enough to break the line! That shows how much can be done by tryin'! The Sea Bird is ready to come off the shoal if we help her a bit; so turn to, lads, an' work for all you're worth till she's in deep water once more!"

The slackened hawser, which a short time previous had been so taut, told that Bob's explanation was the correct one, and there was no necessity to urge either the boys or Joe any further. To have a chance of saving the little steamer after all had firmly believed she was helplessly stranded aroused every member of the crew as nothing else, save the actual arrival of friends, could have done.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CULMINATION OF DISASTERS.

THE FIRST thing necessary was to ascertain exactly what portion of the steamer's hull was imbedded in the sand, and this Bob proceeded to do with the lead-line.

It was found that only about twenty feet of the keel rested on the shoal, the remainder overhanging four or five fathoms of water. The tide was at its highest point, which accounted for the movement of the steamer as the hawser shrank, and Bob cried in a cheery tone:

"I reckon it won't be impossible to launch the little craft, after all. By bringing the hawser on to the winch, shiftin' the ballast aft, an' heavin' down with every ounce of muscle we've got, somethin' oughter be done at the next tide."

Every one was ready to exert himself to the utmost, and in a very short space of time the heavy rope was brought to the winch, after which all hands tugged and strained at the bars until the cable had been hove taut again.

That done, there was an opportunity for rest. It would be useless to attempt anything more until the

now receding waters should rise again, which would be the case twelve hours later, and the little crew gathered under the awning aft to discuss the new phase of affairs, while Joe continued his work on the metal; for this task, apparently so useless a few hours previous, had suddenly become very important.

"The question is, How long may we have to stop here after the tug's afloat?" Bob remarked as he lighted his pipe, and began once more to select from the timbers taken out of the cabin such as could be used on the shattered hull.

"By hard work it may be done in a week's time," Joe replied after some thought.

"Then you'll keep steady at it while me an' the boys 'tend to the other matters. You sha'n't be called to turn your hand on anything else till thas is done. Have we got coal enough for a three-hundred-mile run?"

Joe shook his head.

"I'm afraid not; but by taking on some wood we ought to be able to make it, for I suppose you're counting on going to Nassau?"

"That's the nearest port; an' we'll see to choppin' fuel when she's afloat, an' I've patched the bow a leetle more ship-shape."

During the remainder of the day, when they were not engaged in the galley, Joe had some trifling work which could be performed by the boys, and his every command was obeyed with alacrity, for all hands were eager to utilize each moment in preparing for departure.

That night a watch was kept, although there was nothing to be feared from their late enemies. Bob proposed to have some more exercise at the winch when the tide was at its full height again, and to that end it was necessary one of the party should remain awake to arouse the others at the proper time.

This work, however, had no other result than that of awakening the weary sleepers unnecessarily. Labor as they did to the utmost of their strength, the steamer was not moved so much as a single inch, and the old sailor said, after realizing the uselessness of the task:

"We'll have to shift everything aft, I reckon, before it's possible to pull her off this blessed sand. After sunset to-morrow we'll tackle the job, an' by the second tide have another turn at the winch."

Had the weary ones known just how fortunate they were in thus failing to pull the Sea Bird into deep water there would have been far less repining as they laid down once more on the mattresses under the awning.

The gray light of approaching dawn had but just begun to steal across the sky when Bob called all hands for another day's labor, and when the sun showed himself above the horizon each member of the crew was busily engaged.

Jim had positive orders to finish his task in the galley in the least possible time, because Joe wished to use the stove as a forge; and the breakfast was by no means elaborate, coffee being the only thing served hot.

"There isn't anything you boys can do on board this mornin', an' I reckon you'd better begin the job of cuttin' fuel to help out on the coal," Bob said when the rather unsatisfactory repast was brought to a close.

"How are we to get ashore?" Harry asked. "The raft went adrift when the heaving-line parted."

"She didn't go very far. Look off the port bow an' you'll see her on the beach. It won't be much of a job for Jim to run another rope out, an' he'll be all the better for a bath."

The young fisherman was not averse to what was little less than sport, and if he did spend considerably more time in the water than was absolutely necessary, no one could say any had really been wasted.

When the raft was in working order once more Harry and Walter clambered on board, and soon the shores of the harbor resounded with the blows of their axes. Owing to the scarcity of tools it was only possible for two to work at a time, consequently each had a certain number of minutes in which to rest.

It was after they had been on shore about two hours that Walter, during his idle moments, wandered out from the thicket to see if there had by chance been any change in the steamer's position, and he had not left his companions more than five minutes when they heard him shout:

"Come here, fellows, and see if you can tell what

Joe is doing. It looks to me as if there was a big lot of smoke from the galley."

Not thinking it possible there could be anything wrong on the steamer, neither Jim nor Harry obeyed the summons very quickly, and when five minutes more had elapsed they were yet in the thicket.

"Harry! I'm sure there's some trouble aboard!" he shouted, and this time it was the tone rather than the words which caused them to move quickly.

On arriving where a view of the steamer could he had, Joe and Bob were seen working industriously under the awning; but a thick, black smoke was flowing out of the companion-way. The light breeze carried it shoreward; consequently the laborers, from whom it was hidden by the deck-house, were wholly ignorant of what seemed to Walter very alarming.

It did not require many seconds for Jim to make up his mind as to the cause of this unusual vapor, and his face grew pale as he cried sharply:

"The steamer is on fire! Hurry up an' get aboard!" Then as he ran at full speed along the shore he shouted loudly, "Bob! Bob! Fire! Fire!"

These cries were heard by the workmen before the boys gained the raft, and on glancing shoreward the tell-tale smoke was seen.

In an instant both men were forward, and, after stopping only the merest fraction of time to investigate matters, Bob began to draw up water with the deck-bucket, thus giving full confirmation to the

fears of those on the raft, who were pulling desperately toward the steamer.

Both men were working with the utmost speed, dashing water into the companion-way, and causing the smoke to rise in yet denser volumes. Only once did either speak, and then when Bob shouted in a hoarse voice:

"Hurry on, lads; we'll need all hands at this job if the steamer is to be saved!"

This injunction was unnecessary, for the boys were making every effort to propel the raft at the swiftest possible rate of speed. The water boiled around the forward timbers as if a strong current was setting down toward them, and there was every danger that in their haste the frail craft would be forced asunder.

Long though the time occupied in the passage appeared to be when so much might depend upon an early arrival, it was really not more than five minutes from the time the boys left the shore until they were on deck searching for some article in which water could be carried.

With the exception of the two buckets used by Bob and Joe, everything of the kind was in the galley, and after a hurried, frantic search of the cabin and engine-room, the boys went forward empty-handed.

"There isn't so much as a dipper here!" Jim screamed.

"An' it's jes' as well," Bob replied hoarsely, as a volume of flame burst from the companion-way.

"Nothin' less than a fire-engine would do any good now. It's time we saved what'll be needed ashore. Knock off, Joe, an' we'll load the raft."

The engineer was not willing to give up the struggle so easily. He worked like a fury, dashing water on the roaring, leaping flames, which were already sending out long streams on the tar-covered seams; and not until the fire had full possession of the forward portion did he cease his more than useless labors to assist the others.

Meanwhile Bob and the boys had been throwing bedding, tools, and every article within reach, on the raft. It was not until after they had been thus engaged several moments that any one thought of the treasure in the hold, and then Jim cried more frantically than before:

"The gold! The gold! We *must* get that out!"

"It'll have to take its chances with the rest!" Bob replied sharply. "Even if we could get below, the fire would be upon us before the bags were uncovered. Life is worth more than money jes' now."

Not until everything from the engine-room and cabin which could be of any service ashore had been piled up on the raft did Bob pause, and then the flames covered more than two-thirds of the deck. As a matter of course the heaving-line was long since burned from the winch, and nothing held the rude craft which now bore all their worldly possessions but the painter Harry had made fast to the stern-bitt.

"We shall have to swim for it, lads," Bob said as

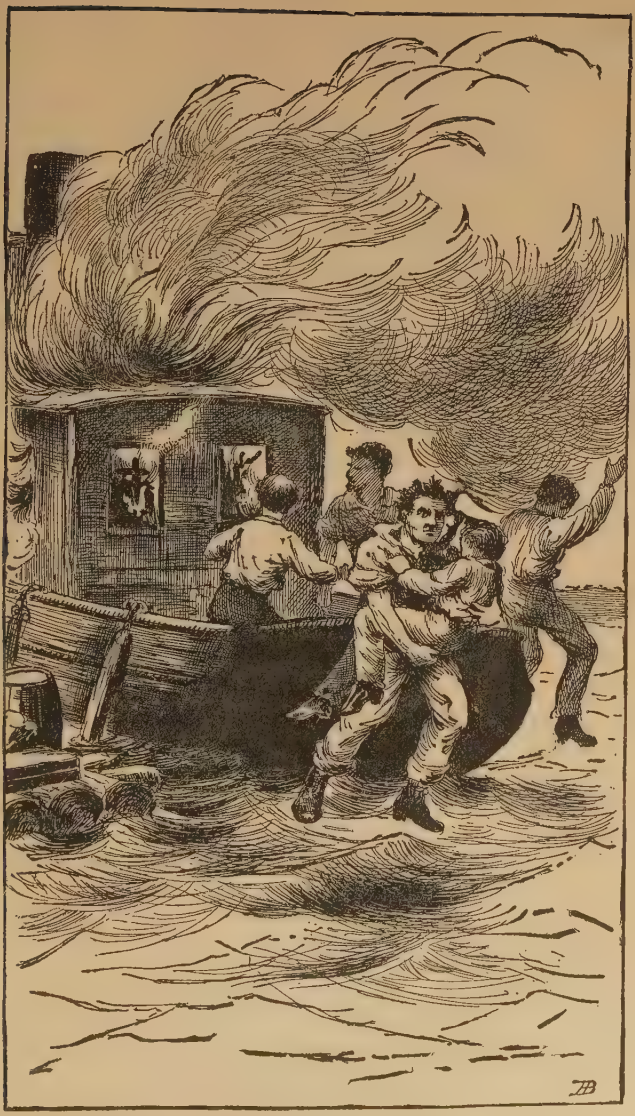
he shielded his face from the intense heat with his hat. "The raft is loaded so deep that the weight of one of us would swamp her."

As he spoke he seized Walter by the waist and leaped overboard, Jim waiting only long enough to ask Harry if he needed any assistance before following the example.

"Don't bother about me!" Harry replied; and then as the flames came nearer he plunged into the sea, Joe lingering a few seconds longer, as if to take one last look at the little craft he had tried so hard to save.

The wind carried the raft shoreward as soon as the painter was let go, therefore those in the water had nothing to care for save their own safety.

In less than ten minutes all hands were standing on the beach watching, with deepest sorrow written on every feature of their countenances, the destruction of the tug in which they had so fondly hoped soon to be steaming toward home.



The engineer seized Walter by the waist and leaped overboard.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SHORE LIFE.

THE LITTLE party on the beach remained as if spell-bound while the fire destroyed what seemed like the last link which bound them to home. The only sounds to be heard, save the roaring of the flames, were when a deep, quivering sigh came from Walter's lips, or Joe gave vent to a suppressed groan.

The fire leaped and danced as if in fiendish glee, devouring the wood-work of the Sea Bird, and warping the machinery beyond all further usefulness, until there was no longer anything above water for it to feed upon. Then slowly, with many a protesting hiss and puff of steam, it gradually died away, the last smouldering ember expiring in less than two hours from the discovery of the danger.

Nothing was left of what had been a jaunty little craft save the blackened lines which marked the position of the hull lying in six feet of water.

When all was over and the smoke no longer arose, Bob said with an evident effort:

"Well, lads, we're what you might call shipwrecked at last, though it jes' the same as took two

good vessels an' a tug to finish us up. Whinin' won't do any good, an' we've got to make some kind of a start at buildin' a hut, for we're here till a craft puts in by mistake an' takes us off."

"I'm the one to blame for this last disaster," Joe said moodily. "Nobody but a fool would have left a roaring fire in the galley without so much as looking at it now and then!"

"Don't go to kickin' up a fuss with yourself," Bob said soothingly. "We all know it was an accident, for you set even more by the steamer than we did. What puzzles me, though, is how it could 'a' happened, no matter how much fire there was."

"In order to heat the iron I took off the top of the stove and opened the entire front. On leaving I paid no attention to closing it, and of course some of the coals must have fallen out."

"We was rich *once*, anyhow," Jim said with a sigh. "It's too bad we worked so hard to get the gold aboard, for it didn't have a chance to do us any good."

"Jes' about this time grub is worth more to us than all the money pirates ever saw!" Bob replied quite sharply, as if realizing the necessity of arousing his companions from their unavailing sorrow. "We've got a tidy bit of work that must be done between this an' sunset, an' it's time we were beginning."

As he spoke he went up the beach a short distance, to where the raft had grounded in twelve inches of water, and began to unload her, carrying

the goods beyond the line of sand to the edge of the thicket.

He was not allowed to labor alone but a few moments. The others were soon at his side, working with a will; and this necessary exertion was most beneficial, since it prevented the little party from dwelling on their misfortunes.

The awning was among the articles saved from the steamer, and the first task after the raft had been unloaded was to set this up as a tent in the same place where the red-nosed man and his companions had encamped. Then it was necessary to build a fire-place, bring all the goods from the shore, and stow the perishable articles under the canvas, where they would not be destroyed in case of a storm.

In order to complete this work before sunset it was essential that each member of the party should do his best regardless of fatigue, and when the task was finished, just as the sun began to descend beyond the horizon, the boys were so nearly exhausted that Bob said:

"Crawl under the tent and lay down. I'll see to what little cookin' we've got on hand, an' it shall be your watch below till mornin'."

The canvas had been fastened to four trees in such a manner as to form a shed-like roof, and while it would be of but little service in event of a heavy storm, it afforded sufficient shelter to protect the homeless ones from the dew and the sun; therefore until the weather changed it was all that could be desired.

The question of food was the most disheartening and caused Bob no slight amount of anxiety. They had saved only such articles as chanced to be on deck. A round of pork which Jim brought from the fore-peak and left under the awning, quite by accident, when he was preparing for the voyage in the yawl; half a dozen pounds of ship's-biscuit from the cabin-locker; a sheet of corn-bread which, together with a jug of molasses, the workmen had taken from the galley to serve as lunch, and about a peck of potatoes, made up the total amount of provisions for five people until aid in some form should come.

There was barely enough for two days' consumption, and no one knew better than Bob how long a time might elapse before a vessel approached near enough to be signaled.

This was the one thought in his mind as he built a small fire and broiled a limited number of slices cut from the pork, while Joe was busily engaged stowing the last of their belongings under the canvas.

"It's a case of turtle-huntin' to-morrow, I reckon," he said grimly as the engineer, having arranged the goods to his satisfaction, threw himself on the grass near the fire. "It'll be mighty short rations for all hands unless we look sharp."

"There ought to be plenty of fish in the cove," Joe replied after a moment's thought. "I'll make something that'll serve as a hook, and the boys can spend their time on the raft. There are oysters here, most

likely; and if the Bonita struck the shoal anywhere near, something eatable may have been washed ashore."

"I hadn't thought of that!" and Bob's face brightened as he spoke. "You an' I will take a trip around the key in the mornin', an' then perhaps things will look more cheerful. I reckon we're all tired enough to sleep to-night, but from the next sunrise somebody must be on watch for a sail every hour. It's the only chance we've got now of ever leavin' this blessed place."

"Then send Walter out on the point after breakfast. For the next few days standing watch will be the lightest work, an' he, being the smallest, should have the softest job."

"I guess that's about the way we'll fix things," Bob replied as he laid the last slice of smoked and blackened pork on a broad leaf. "Let's have supper an' turn in, so's to be on deck early in the mornin'."

It was not a very palatable meal to which the boys were summoned. A small piece of corn-bread, two ship's-biscuit, and one thick slice of the poor apology for meat was what Bob portioned out to each, and when the unsatisfactory repast was ended all save Joe crawled under the canvas on the two mattresses. He remained by the fire until a rude fish-hook had been fashioned from a stout piece of iron wire, when, joining the others, he also was soon wrapped in the blissful unconsciousness of sleep.

At a very early hour next morning Jim resumed

his duties as cook, and the breakfast was even less appetizing than the supper.

Then Bob read the party a short lesson which he thought, and with good reason, they needed:

"Now, my hearties, work is what we all want, to keep us from thinkin' too much of the little steamer that has gone up in smoke, an' there must be a good bit of it unless we're willin' to go hungry. Don't worry about anything, but remember some kind of craft is bound to put in here before long; an' if the gold is frettin' you, why I'm bound to say there's no reason to look on it as lost."

This last remark caused no amount of surprise among his audience, and noting the good effect, he spoke more decidedly:

"The treasure was packed under the ballast, an' before the fire could get anywhere near it the hull must 'a' been full of water. Now, to pull it out ain't much more'n child's play; but it's our duty to lay in a fair stock of grub before tacklin' the job, an' we can work knowin' all hands are as rich as they were before the fire started."

This little speech did a wonderful amount of good. Despite their forlorn and perhaps dangerous position, every member of the party had bewailed the loss of the gold more than any other thing. But now that Bob spoke of recovering it in such a matter-of-fact tone, they suddenly regained all their lost courage, and were ready to begin the labors of the day.

Immediately after being awakened Joe had begun

the tedious task of weaving a fishing-line from the strands of the heaving-rope, and by the time Bob concluded his inspiriting speech a cord thirty feet long was completed.

To attach the rudely-fashioned hook and a rock to serve as sinker required only a few moments, and then Jim and Harry had their portion of the work mapped out.

"Use the pork as bait, an' when you've caught fish enough for dinner knock off. We've got nothin' to cure 'em with, an' there's no sense in takin' more'n we can eat at one time. Walter is to stand watch on the north point, an' you can join him when your job is finished."

Then the two men and the boy started off around the shore to the only place on the key from which a passing craft could be seen, and the young fisherman, with some pieces of half-burned planks as oars, sculled the raft out into deep water.

A brisk walk of half an hour was necessary before a sightly spot for the sentinel could be found; and Joe said, as he and Bob continued on around the beach to search for oysters:

"It'll be a bit lonesome here, Walt; but you must do a share of the work. Keep your weather-eye lifting all the time, an' if you see any kind of a craft sing out till we answer."

Walter did feel a trifle nervous at being left alone so far from his companions; but he made a manly effort to appear brave, and said, as the men walked swiftly away:

"Don't trouble yourselves about me. I can stand watch as well as any one else, and if a sail does heave in sight you shall know it."

"That's right, lad; keep up your courage whatever may happen, an' everything will come out ship-shape!" Bob shouted cheerily as he and Joe disappeared around a clump of bushes, leaving Walter alone with the mournful lip, lip, lip of the sea ringing in his ears like a funeral dirge.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PREPARING THE BEACONS.

AFTER leaving the sentinel on duty Bob and Joe walked around the shore at a rapid pace, for it was their purpose to explore the island while searching for food and wreckage; and since it would be almost dangerous to remain on the open beach after the sun was high in the heavens, there was really but a few hours during which their investigations could be pursued.

As a matter of course they were eager to get some definite idea of where the Bonita had been stranded in order to know at which point the wreckage would be likely to come ashore, and this information was soon gained. After a brisk walk of half an hour the searchers were at the most northerly end of the key, and directly before them, not more than half a mile from the beach, in a westerly direction, was the wreck.

The gale which had driven the Sea Bird ashore had torn and riven the ill-fated brig until she was little more than a shapeless mass of timbers, and then thrown her high up on the sands, where she presented a mournful-looking spectacle. In every direction could be seen casks, spars, cordage and

splintered timbers, some half-buried on the beach, while others dotted the shoals along the west side of the key.

"It will be a good week's work to overhaul all that stuff," Joe said after the two had surveyed the scene of desolation several moments in silence. "There is plenty of material with which to make a flare in case it should be needed."

"That's what we'd better prepare fer before doin' anything else," Bob replied. "Those casks are full of alcohol, an' by rollin' half a dozen to different points along the shore from here to where we left Walter, I reckon we can make sich a show of fireworks that none but a blind crew could get past without seein' us."

"I'm beginning to think vessels don't come this way. We shouldn't have seen a single one since we've been here if that schooner hadn't put in for the express purpose of capturing those men."

"Don't get sich an idee into your head, lad," the old sailor said cheerily. "We're right in the track of traders an' steamers; but this is the wrong season of the year. A month from now you'll see two or three a week."

"That's a long while to wait on short allowance."

"It's way ahead of how we might 'a' been fixed. Now, instead of moonin' 'bout what can't be helped, s'pose we get the casks where they can be used when the right time comes."

Joe's depression was but momentary. He understood quite as well as did his companion the evils of

giving way to dismal thoughts when so much depended upon their own efforts, and without further words the task was begun.

To roll the heavy casks over the loose sand was fatiguing, and when the sun climbed so high that the heat became almost unbearable, only three of the barrels were in position. The first of these was at the most northerly point of the island; another had been set on end beyond reach of the tide, two hundred yards south, and the last was about the same distance down the shore.

These could be made ready for lighting in a few seconds, since it was proposed only to knock in the heads, pour out half the contents to prevent the possibility of an explosion, and set fire to the remainder.

"By rollin' thirty or forty casks beyond high-water mark we shall have plenty of fuel in case the first attempt is a failure!" Bob said as they walked down the beach to where Walter was on watch. "There won't be any change in the weather for a week or more, an' in that time we can gather a good stock of alcohol."

When Bob and Joe arrived at the point there was little need of asking if the sentinel had sighted anything resembling a sail, for while working they were able to gain even a more extended view than he, and not so much as a sea-gull's wing could be seen.

Jim and Harry were with Walter, they having accomplished their task in the most satisfactory manner.

"It didn't take ten minutes to catch all we can eat between now an' mornin'!" Jim said in reply to Joe's question. "If the Mary Walker was here she could get a full fare in half a day, for the fish bite like mackerel. Jes' say the word an' I'll roast some now, so we sha'n't have to walk back to the tent."

"Go ahead, lad; an' after the sun gets a little lower we'll take you an' Harry up the beach, where there's considerable work to be done."

Anticipating that his proposition would be accepted, Jim had made ready for the culinary operations to the extent of collecting a goodly supply of fuel, and in less than an hour the little party were feasting on fish roasted in leaves among the hot ashes.

Until about three o'clock they remained within shelter of the foliage near the sea enjoying the siesta, even though their condition was well calculated to dishearten the most sanguine, and then Bob proposed that they continue the work of preparing beacons.

In this labor the two boys could accomplish quite as much as Bob and Joe, and half an hour before sunset ten casks were in the desired positions. Now it would be possible in a very short time to send up such a volume of flame as would illumine all that portion of the coast, and from a craft within ten miles of the key it could readily be seen.

"We can reckon on leavin' this place aboard the first vessel that heaves in sight," Bob said in a tone of satisfaction as they walked leisurely along the

shore of the harbor toward the camp. "Of course it wouldn't do any good to stand watch after dark; but some one must be on the point every hour of daylight, an' the boys can divide that work to suit themselves."

It would not be the most cheerful task, this remaining alone on the shore gazing out over the restless ocean; but only through such work was there a probable chance of rescue, and the discomfort or weariness did not have so much as a place in their thoughts.

The preparations for attracting attention had caused the boys to believe their time of imprisonment was rapidly drawing to a close. Bob's positive statement that the chain of flares could not fail of being seen caused them to appear like the first real step taken toward home, and the thought of the pirates' treasure came uppermost in the minds of all.

"Why not begin work on it to-morrow?" Jim asked, when Bob referred to the task as one easy of accomplishment. "Harry an' I can catch fish enough in half an hour to last a week, an' if we wait too long another storm may break up the hull so that the gold can't be found."

"I reckon we've got little to fear from storms yet awhile," Bob replied carelessly. "This weather is likely to hold for a week or more."

"That may be," Joe said; "and then, again, it's possible for you to be mistaken. I think as Jim does—that we ought to save it while there's a chance.

If this weather holds, the casks of alcohol will stay where they are, and it is as well to let that portion of the work wait as delay the other and more important."

"I'm agreeable to anything, only I didn't feel as if there was a great call to be in a hurry, 'cause it would have to be a roarin' old gale that could do much damage to the hulk;" and Bob looked across the harbor to the narrow line of charcoal and blackened timbers which might be seen just above the surface of the water. "If things are as I think, it won't be a long job, an' we can finish it up in one day."

"Then what's the use of wasting time? If a vessel puts in here we would be ready to leave at once; and her crew might think themselves entitled to a good slice of the money if they helped us get it out of the wreck."

The boys agreed perfectly with Joe, and since Bob had no objections to the plan, it was decided that the work should be begun on the following morning.

The little party were in the tent by the time this decision was arrived at; and the shelter had been gained none too soon, for the gloom of another night had already settled down over the key. Although all hands were tired no one cared to go to sleep just then because of the excitement caused by mention of the treasure, and a small fire was built for the double purpose of driving away mosquitoes and lending a more cheerful aspect to the encampment.

While Bob and Joe discussed plans for the next

morning's work the boys listened intently, and it was not until a very late hour in the night that any one thought of retiring. Then the old sailor said gruffly, as if some peremptory command of his had been disobeyed :

"Don't you ever mean to turn in, or must I lay every blessed son of you away? All hands want to become divers; but unless we get some sleep before mornin' there won't be much work done!"

"I s'pose we can keep awake as long as the skipper does," Jim said laughingly; and for reply Bob picked him up bodily and threw him on one of the mattresses, with strict injunctions to "snore in five minutes or expect a taste of the rope's-end."

Never since the day when the Bonita ran away with the crew of the Sally Walker had the boys been so cheerful, and this enviable frame of mind was brought about by the preparations made for signaling a vessel. They were not one whit nearer being rescued; but yet it seemed as if the time for leaving the key was already very close at hand.

"If ten casks of alcohol can make this crowd feel so good we'd better end-up about a hundred to-morrow," Joe said as the camp-fire was extinguished and all hands crept under the canvas.

"It seems as if we were going to see home at last," Harry replied. "Bob says we are certain of being sighted by the first crew that passes, and in that case it isn't likely we shall have to stay here much longer."

"You can take my word for it, lad, that before

another week goes by we shall be on our way either to the States or Nassau; so go to sleep, for I reckon on callin' all hands mighty early in the mornin'."

It was not so easy for the boys to close their eyes in slumber owing to the unusual excitement; but they did finally succeed, and when Bob shouted "All hands on deck!" just as the sun showed his glowing face above the waters once more, every member of the party leaped to his feet ready for the day's work.

Their toilets were soon made by a hurried plunge into the sea, and a not very pleasant "rub-down" with a piece of canvas—which does not make a satisfactory towel—and then, while Jim prepared breakfast from the limited material at his command, Bob went out to the point for his regular morning's survey of the surrounding waters.

"There's nothin' in sight," he reported on his return in obedience to the cook's summons; "but we mustn't get discouraged if a craft don't show up for a week. Walter is to go on guard as soon as he gets breakfast, an' one of you boys can spell him toward noon."

The toasted pork and ship's-biscuit was not so inviting as to induce any of the party to linger very long over the meal, and in a few moments after the old sailor's return all hands were ready to begin the work which would settle the question as to whether the treasure could be recovered, or if it had been found only to be lost forever.

CHAPTER XXX.

AMATEUR DIVERS.

THE DETAILS of the work had been decided upon during the conversation held the evening previous; therefore there was nothing to prevent them from putting into immediate execution the plan proposed by Bob.

Walter went around to the left shore of the harbor to reach his lonely post of duty, while the others made their way in the opposite direction to where the raft had been partially pulled up on the beach.

"It's a case of swimmin'; but I think we had better keep on our trousers and shirts, otherwise the flies and mosquitoes will make matters too lively for us," Bob said, as he removed a portion of his clothing, and then waded into the water to launch the raft. "On a hot day like this we shall soon dry off an' be none the worse for the bath."

The work was to be done entirely by diving, as a matter of course; and since the laborers would be out of the water a greater portion of the time, the old sailor's advice was very good. To expose their bare skins to the fervent rays of the sun and the attacks of insects would cause great suffering.

They carried with them nothing but a piece of the heaving-line and two lengths of iron pipe, which had been taken from the burning steamer only because they chanced to be on deck. These last would serve as a weight to hold them down in the water, and also as a poor apology for shovels in digging away the ballast covering the treasure; but Joe hoped to find the long fire-hoe, a tool which would lessen their labors very materially.

The two elder members of the party waded out in advance, pulling the raft after them while the boys pushed on the timbers until the depth of water made swimming a necessity, when Harry and Jim allowed themselves to be towed.

Not more than half an hour was spent getting the collection of timbers into position, and then they were made fast to the charred rail near the bow, opposite that portion of the hull where the treasure was supposed to be.

If the machinery had fallen toward the stern there was every chance the work would be successful; but in case it tumbled forward when the wooden supports were burned, all hope was vain, because the heavy metal could not be hoisted out with the limited means at their command.

The boiler remained upright, held in position by the bolts and bands of iron which were fastened to the keel itself; and Joe said, as the excited party stood a moment on the raft to survey the scene:

"Six feet forward of the boiler is where we must search, and I'd better make the first attempt, for I

can tell just what part of the machinery is in our road, while the rest of you wouldn't know so much about it."

"Lower yourself by the timbers. It won't do to dive head foremost until we're sure everything is clear," and Bob held out his hand to assist the engineer in making the descent.

Joe fastened the heaving-line to the iron pipes that he might have weight enough to hold him at the bottom while making the investigation, when those on the raft could haul up the metal to be used again, and, swinging clear of the rail with Bob's aid, he sunk beneath the surface.

Never had a hundred seconds appeared so long to Harry as now. It seemed that the diver had been out of sight fully five minutes, and he was beginning to fear some accident had happened, when Joe reappeared, gasping for breath but looking very happy.

"There's nothing to interfere with our working," he said, as soon as it was possible to speak. "Nearly everything has fallen aft, and, with the exception of some light fittings, the ballast is as free as when we left it."

"Is the raft in the right position?" Bob asked.

"As near as I can make out it should be run ahead, ten or a dozen feet. I pulled away five or six of the largest rocks; but a fellow can't do very much work when it's impossible to breathe."

Bob was eager to make the descent, and after Jim had pulled in the pipe-weights he hauled the raft

ahead wnere Harry and Joe made her fast again as the old sailor disappeared beneath the surface.

He remained below several seconds longer than had the engineer, and on coming up confirmed the first report.

"It's only a matter of time before we'll have our hands on that gold once more," he said. "I reckon Joe begun in the right place, an' we must all work on the same hole. Jim, you go over, and leave Harry to 'tend to the weights."

"What's to be done when I'm down there?"

"Pull away the rocks an' gravel as we've done. Don't try to stay too long at a time, but work lively while you are there."

Jim was too good a swimmer to be afraid, and he leaped in from the rail, since there was no further fear in making the descent. He looked red in the face when Harry saw him again, but appeared to be in high glee.

"It's nothin' more'n I've done down to the Isle of Shoals lots of times when the fellers have tried to see who could stay under water the longest," he said as Harry pulled in the weight and Joe took possession of it at once, that the work might not be delayed.

"I thought it was my turn;" and Harry looked disappointed because he had not been allowed to follow Jim.

"You'll have plenty of chances after awhile," Bob replied. "Although it don't seem very much to do, none of us can keep it up a great while. 'Tend to

the weights 'till Jim needs a rest, an' then take his place."

But little time was spent in conversation, now that the work had fairly begun. In rapid succession the divers leaped from the raft until each had made a dozen descents, when it became necessary for them to rest, and Harry was allowed to do his share.

He performed but little work during the first descent, because by the time he had looked about him with no slight degree of curiosity it became necessary to rise to the surface for air. He was surprised, however, with the progress made. The ballast had been dug and pushed away until a deep excavation could be seen, and it seemed certain the greater portion of the treasure's covering had been removed.

To his delight it was reserved for him to raise the first package of the precious metal. While the others were stretched out on the raft resting from the fatiguing work, he went down four times in rapid succession, and then electrified his companions by shouting as he came to the surface:

"I've got one bag out; but can't bring it up!"

During the next two or three moments the divers cheered until Walter must have heard the noise, and then Joe said, as he took from his pocket a stout piece of wire bent in the form of a hook:

"While you fellows were talking last night I made this. We'll bend it on one end of the heaving-line, and it will only be necessary to stick the wire

into the canvas when those on the raft can pull up the bag."

Harry was eager to have the credit of taking out the first lot of treasure, and, recognizing his right, the others waited until he had fastened on the hook, Joe hauling in the coin, at the same time the diver's head appeared above the surface.

Another prolonged cheer greeted this first tangible result of their labors, and it was so hearty that Walter appeared from around the point, having evidently come for the purpose of learning the cause of the noise.

He was too far away for the happy divers to enter into any lengthy conversation with him, and Joe held up the bag of gold where it could be seen.

There was no question but that he understood the good news, for during the next five minutes he capered around the beach in the most extravagant fashion, and not until the others turned to resume their labors did he go back to his post of duty.

Since only one nineteenth of the treasure had been recovered there was yet considerable work to be performed, more especially as each could remain below but a few seconds at a time, and the task was continued with redoubled energy.

When the divers were forced to rest again two more bags had been hoisted on to the raft, and after the number was increased to five, Bob said:

"We must knock off until later in the day. It won't do to stay in the water too long, or this gold will cost the lives of some of us. We'll call Walter

in, have dinner, and try again when the sun gets lower."

Jim did not fancy ceasing work until the entire amount of treasure had been recovered, although he needed rest as much as either of the others.

"It'll take two days at this rate if we keep diving all the time," he said disconsolately, "an' I think it ought to be finished right up."

"The hardest part is done now that the ballast is well cleared away, an' I reckon we'll come mighty nigh endin' the job by sunset," Bob replied. "But no matter how long it lasts we've got to look out for ourselves, an' too much water is as bad as not enough. Halloo, Walter! Wal-ter!"

The remainder of the party joined in the cry until the sentinel appeared from around the point staggering under the weight of some heavy load which was carried on his back. By gestures the boy was made to understand that he should come to the camp, and the others speculated as to the nature of his burden while they pulled the raft and its precious cargo ashore.

"Perhaps he's found more gold," Jim suggested.

"I reckon it's oysters. There are some on the south side of the point, an' most likely that's how he has been fillin' up his time."

In this supposition Bob was correct. Walter had occupied himself in gathering a quantity of the tiny bivalves, which he brought to camp by converting his coat into a bag; and a most welcome and appetizing meal did they make for the divers, who were too weary to spend any time fishing.

The sentinel was profuse in his expressions of joy that the task of recovering the treasure had proved to be comparatively such a simple one, and he insisted on carrying every bag to the tent, that the divers might gain the greatest possible amount of rest before continuing their work.

After a big fire had been built the tiny oysters were thrown on the coals, and drawn out with split sticks when they showed sighs of being roasted. This was such delicious food that twice the number Walter brought could have been eaten, although the supply formed a reasonably hearty meal, and it was decided unanimously to spend at least one day gathering these delicacies as soon as the operations at the wreck were concluded.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUSPENSE.

ON THIS day the siesta was not prolonged. Every member of the party was eager to be at work again, and much sooner than Bob had intended they were pushing the raft out to the wreck while Walter was making his way around the beach, to resume the apparently useless task of watching.

Again was Harry forced to perform that which seemed to be the least important portion of the work. Bob believed, and with good reason, that the boy could not endure as much as the others, who were more accustomed to fatigue; therefore he positively forbade his diving save at rare intervals.

The work during the afternoon was conducted as in the earlier portion of the day; but it progressed much more rapidly, because the ballast had been removed. To avoid a repetition of detail, it is sufficient to say that the sun was yet two hours high in the heavens when Harry pulled up the nineteenth bag, and that which had seemed a well-nigh hopeless task was accomplished.

It was well that the last portion of the treasure had been taken out quickly, for the alternate diving and standing in the hot air affected all hands so

severely that it is doubtful if either could have continued the work an hour longer.

As a matter of course Harry was comparatively fresh, he having been under the water only five or six times, and when the clumsy craft was pulled ashore he insisted on carrying the entire treasure to the tent.

The weary divers lay on the warm sand in wet clothing, which was being speedily dried by the sun, until the last heavy bag had been taken to the tent and covered by the mattresses. Even then they would have continued to enjoy their well-earned rest if a most welcome announcement had not been made by the sentinel.

It was just as Harry returned from the final trip to the tent that he electrified his companions by shouting:

"There comes Walt at full speed! Perhaps a vessel is in sight!"

Every member of the party was on his feet in an instant watching the sentinel, who ran along the beach waving his hat in the most frantic manner, and on getting within hailing distance cried, using both hands as a speaking-trumpet:

"I can see something to the northward! It's pretty far away, but I'm sure it's a vessel!"

Harry and Jim were literally wild with excitement, because of this joyful news; but Bob remained sufficiently calm to be able to calculate as to the length of time before the stranger could approach within hailing distance.

"There isn't wind enough to bring her this way very fast," he said after what seemed to be a long pause. "We've got time to start all the signals in good shape. Pick up the axes an' we'll see what kind of flares fifteen or twenty gallons of alcohol will make."

Jim and Harry obeyed this command without loss of time, and then started around the beach at full speed; but Bob and Joe followed more leisurely.

The boys might as well have husbanded their strength, as was learned on arriving at the point; for, to the great disappointment of both, the sail was so far away that it became necessary to search the horizon-line several moments before discovering the tiny white speck.

"That isn't much to feel glad about," Harry said, as if believing the sentinel had caused needless excitement.

"It's a good deal more than we've seen before, except when the schooner from Nassau put in here," Walter replied. "It didn't look half as big when I first saw it, and I watched a long time before telling you."

While Harry and Jim were gazing at that which looked more like the wing of a bird than a canvas large enough to propel a ship, Bob and Joe arrived. They did not appear to be at all disappointed; and, in fact, the old sailor stared at the tiny object as if it was even nearer than he expected, while he said to the engineer:

"I reckon we'll be able to make out what kind of a craft she is before dark. There is yet considerable of a job necessary to get the signals in workin' order, an' we'd better begin."

The entire party would be needed, and all hands started up the beach, halting at the first cask. The head of this was knocked in, a little more than half its contents poured out, and one of the signals was in readiness for the spark of light which would send the flames mounting skyward.

"Ain't you goin' to touch her off?" Jim asked, as the old sailor went toward the next beacon.

"There'll be time enough when we've attended to the whole lot. That craft is on her reg'lar course, bound for Nassau most likely, an' will keep on within two or three miles of the key."

It was an hour before the last cask had been prepared, and in that time the stranger had lessened the distance so much that Bob unhesitatingly pronounced her a top-sail schooner.

"Her spars look a leetle too trim for a trader, an' she carries so much sail that I reckon she's a pleasure craft with a lot of fresh-water sailors aboard. Howsomever, they'll know enough to stand in when they see this 'ere illumination, an' that oughter satisfy us."

Bob waited half an hour longer before firing the alcohol, and then the evening shadows were beginning to lengthen into the gloom of night. All the stranger's spars could be seen quite distinctly, and there was but little question that she was a yacht.

When the bluish flames leaped up, casting a ghastly glare upon the surrounding objects, it was no longer possible for the party on the key to see any distance over the ocean because of the blinding light; but they had the intense satisfaction of knowing that the sudden illumination must of a necessity be observed by those on the schooner, and also that its purpose could not be mistaken.

"Set 'em all ablaze, boys!" Bob shouted; and one by one the long pillars of flame shot up from the beach until that portion of the key was fringed with fiery monuments.

After this had been done the little party stood at the water's edge trying in vain to peer through the gloom, which was growing more dense each moment; and in a short while it was ascertained that, brilliant though the beacons were, they would not continue so any very great length of time. The alcohol burned furiously, sending forth an intense heat which caused the casks to burst asunder, thereby allowing large quantities of the spirits to sink in the sand, and half an hour after the first had been ignited the volume of flame decreased very materially.

"This won't do!" Joe cried in dismay. "By the time that schooner gets near the island our signals will have died out entirely, and they may keep on their course without thinking it worth while to stop."

"We could cut some wood," Harry suggested; but realized, even as he spoke, how insignificant would be such a fire after these mighty shafts of flame.

"It'll be better to roll more casks down," Bob said quickly. "Never mind the work, so long as we can hail that craft."

No one cared how much labor might be involved providing the desired result was gained, and all hands ran swiftly up the beach to where the Bonita's cargo lay half buried in the sand. It was as much as the three boys could do to roll a heavy cask over the shingle; but they worked manfully while Bob and Joe struggled with another, and in a few moments after the first two signals had died out they were replaced by fresh supplies of this costly fuel.

During the next three hours every member of the party tugged and pulled and lifted with a feverish energy born of the knowledge that their chances of being rescued depended upon the exertions made, and then it was not possible to longer continue the task. All were so exhausted that further efforts were absolutely out of the question, and Bob said, as he wiped away the perspiration which ran down his face in tiny streams:

"It's no use, lads. What with the divin' an' this last job, I'm tuckered out. If she don't pay any attention to us after all this glare we couldn't make 'em stop by telling the whole story.

"Perhaps she has already passed," Harry suggested, as he choked back a sob. "The rate at which that schooner was sailing when we last saw her would have brought her here long before this."

"For all we can tell she may be hove-to half a mile off the shore," Bob said consolingly. "A

captain would need know this shoal mighty well to run in here on a night so black as this one."

"They've got the lights to guide them;" and from the tone of Walter's voice it could be understood he was giving way to despair.

"That wouldn't do them any good, for these flames only illumine this portion of the coast, and throw the entrance of the harbor into deeper shadow," Joe said, speaking for the first time since the labors were brought to a close. "Besides, there are such things as false lights kindled for the purpose of wrecking vessels, and any careful captain would most likely want to wait for daylight; but he might at least send a boat ashore."

This last portion of the engineer's remarks took from the boys any consolation they might have found in his speculations, and they seated themselves on the sand very wretched both in body and mind.

The beacons expired one by one, and the last was but a feeble, flickering flame when the report of fire-arms rang out sharp and distinct on the still air, causing every member of that mournful party to spring to his feet in alarm.

The detonations had not been heard at regular intervals, as one might naturally suppose would be the case if they served as signals to let the castaways know that succor was at hand, but came together in a rapid volley, as if several weapons were discharged at the same time, and those on the beach looked at each other in dismay.

"What's the meaning of that?" Harry asked nervously, and the old sailor replied gravely:

"I don't know, lad. It may be they want us to understand that the schooner will stand by till mornin'; an' then, ag'in, there may be some trouble aboard."

"Are they near enough for us to hail them?"

"No; not accordin' to them sounds. I should say the schooner was a good half mile away. Anyhow, we know she's near, an' the rest can be found out at sunrise."

To wait until morning before there could be an end to the painful suspense appeared almost as bad as to know the vessel had continued on without paying any attention to their signals; and Jim said petulantly:

"It seems as if they might let us know what was goin' to be done."

"There's no use to kick ag'in what can't be helped, lad. Try to go to sleep, an' then the time won't appear so long."

To follow this advice was entirely out of the question. It would have been impossible for the weariest of the party to close his eyes in slumber, and in silence and fear they waited for the long, dreary hours of the night to pass.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JOY.

IT WAS useless for the boys to argue with themselves that the rapid discharge of musketry could have no sinister meaning. They were in that frame of mind when no silver lining can be seen, even to the smallest cloud; and against their own better judgment they decided that the strange schooner either would be of no assistance to them, or that she was manned by a crew which might attempt to inflict further injuries.

Joe thoughtlessly suggested that perhaps the red-nosed man was in command, and had come to get the Bonita's cargo. This was said more in jest than as something with a possible foundation of truth; but it was sufficient to excite all of Jim's fears, and he actually tried to induce Harry and Walter to go with him into the thicket, where they might hide until the schooner had left the vicinity.

While the boys would not agree to anything quite as wild as this, they were seriously alarmed; and when the rattle and splash of oars broke the stillness Walter was almost sorry he had not followed the young fisherman's advice.

"We haven't got to wait long before findin' out

if they'll take us away from this blessed key!" Bob said cheerily. "Here comes a boat, an' unless I'm makin' a big mistake we'll soon be leavin' this 'ere cove bound for some civilized port!"

Louder and more distinctly sounded the clink of oars in the row-locks until from out the darkness came the welcome hail:

"Ahoy, on the island!"

"Halloo!" Bob shouted with a roar, as if afraid any ordinary cry would not be heard by those from whom he expected assistance.

"Have you got three boys there who were carried away from the Isle of Shoals in the brig Bonita?"

"Ay! ay! an' they'll be mighty glad of a chance to leave!"

This question surprised the boys almost to the verge of bewilderment. It was positive the red-nosed man would not ask for them so solicitously; and yet, who else in that lonely portion of the ocean knew anything regarding their mishaps?

Harry and Walter clasped hands as if in a daze, both so excited as to be unable to speak until a second voice from out the darkness shouted:

"Are you there, Harry?"

"It's father! It's father!" Harry screamed, as he ran toward the water; and there, with Walter at his side, he stood straining his eyes in the vain effort to see the boat, but in his joyful astonishment giving no heed to the apparently strange fact that those whom he loved had known so well where to look for the Bonita's involuntary crew.

It was not possible for the little craft to land with safety on the beach, where the surf was breaking with sufficient force to overturn if not stave her to pieces, and he who had first hailed now cried:

"Is there a landing-place near by?"

"You're at the mouth of a cove in which there's water enough to float a ship," Joe replied. "I'll walk along the beach to where there is no surf."

By shouting continually he succeeded in piloting the boat behind the point where a landing could be effected, and a few moments later both Harry and Walter were clasped in Mr. Vandyne's arms.

For some moments no word was spoken, and then the boys poured forth a flood of questions regarding the loved ones from whom they had been so long separated.

"They are all well at home," Mr. Vandyne replied laughingly; "but we had better settle down for the night before I attempt to give you the information required. Shall we go aboard the schooner?"

In their exceeding great joy the boys had forgotten the treasure entirely, and it is quite probable they would have said "Yes" to the last question but for Bob. He had not been in such a state of despair prior to the coming of the boat as to render happiness so bewildering, and he also had a very clear idea of what should be done.

"I axes your pardon for interferin', sir," he said, stepping very close to Mr. Vandyne and speaking in a low tone, "but there's particular reasons why you'd better have a chance to talk with us alone

afore your crew comes ashore or we leave the key!"

Harry's father was considerably mystified by this odd statement; but he hesitated only an instant before asking:

"Have you got any kind of a shelter?"

"A decently good tent, with a couple of mattresses to lie on," Bob replied. "It ain't the best that ever was, but you can manage to get along one night, I reckon."

"It's something we've found that he wants you to see," Harry whispered; and turning to the crew, who were lying on their oars a short distance away, Mr. Vandyne said:

"I will stay on shore until morning. Go back to the yacht; and at sunrise, if you think there's no danger, bring her into this cove."

"Ay, ay, sir," a voice replied; and then the sound of oars in the water told that the boat was leaving the harbor, probably steering for a tiny red light which could now be seen some distance off the land.

"What have you got which there is so much mystery about?" Mr. Vandyne asked, as the gentle splash and ripple of water which told that the sailors were returning to their craft died away in the distance.

"We have found a pirate's treasure," Harry said in a whisper. "There are nineteen bags full of all kinds of money."

"Pirates' treasure!" his father repeated in astonishment.

"What the lad says is a fact, sir;" and Bob stepped forward once more. "We had no way of findin' out how much it was worth; but there's altogether too big an amount for us to run the risk of lettin' strangers see the pile."

"Where is it?"

"At the camp, sir. I'll lead the way. Jim, you foller behind me an' let Joe bring up the rear."

Then Bob set out at such a rapid pace that there was but little opportunity for conversation until the entire distance had been traversed.

Joe and Jim built a huge camp-fire, and after Harry introduced his father to the three members of the party who were strangers, Bob pulled from beneath the mattresses one of the treasure bags.

"There are eighteen more jes' like that," he said, as he slashed the tarred canvas with his knife until the yellow coins fell in a golden stream at Mr. Vandyne's feet. "We haven't overhauled many of 'em; but one's a fair sample of the lot."

"Why, you've got a fortune here!" the gentleman cried in surprise as he assured himself that the pieces were gold and of large denomination. "Where and how did you find it?"

"It'll need a pretty long yarn to give you an understandin' of the whole cruise, an' we'll each do a share of the spinnin' so the thing will come out ship-shape," Bob said, as he began to fill a pipe, that his character of story-teller might be enacted properly. "You've got all night for the hearin', so there's no pertic'lar hurry. Harry shall begin, an'

I'll chip in when he comes to the pickin' up of me after I'd thinned down pretty nearly to a ghost."

Perhaps Mr. Vandyne would have preferred to hear the story in fragments rather than at one sitting; but Bob was bent on spinning a yarn, and as there was no practicable alternative he was forced to submit.

Harry began without delay, Jim and Walter interrupting whenever he neglected to give all the details. The old sailor then related the particulars of the involuntary cruise up to the time Joe came aboard. He in turn told of the disaster to the Sea Bird, and Bob finished the story, which occupied considerably more than an hour in the telling.

"We shall have to let the crew know what you've got here, although there's no necessity of explaining where or how it was found, for they will be needed to take the bags aboard," Mr. Vandyne said, after the lengthy "yarn" had been spun. "There is no danger, for the schooner is commanded by a man in whom I have every confidence, and there won't be a piece missing when we arrive in New York."

"Now tell us how you knew where we were?" Harry asked.

"The party who came in search of the murderers gave your written story to the newspapers in Savannah, and it was copied all over the country."

Then Mr. Vandyne briefly related what had previously been done toward finding the boys.

When the Sally Walker failed to return it was

supposed she had been blown out to sea, and every available craft was hired to search for the missing party. When a week passed without the hoped-for result, it seemed certain that all were dead, and they were mourned for until the newspaper articles appeared.

The remainder of the story was brief. Mr. Vandyne had just purchased the schooner-yacht Lorlie—the same craft which was now hove-to off the key—and in her he started for the Bahamas.

"What was the meaning of those pistol-shots we heard, sir?" Joe asked. "They sounded like a fight rather than a signal."

"I wanted to let you understand we were coming, and emptied my revolver at the same moment the captain did his. There was considerable noise, I'll admit; but knowing we should land in a few moments, I paid little attention to it at the time."

The sun was already sending forth heralds of his coming when the happy party exhausted their questions and explanations, and half an hour later the Lorlie was anchored in the cove, with the five who had passed through so many adventures eating a hearty breakfast in her luxuriously-furnished cabin.

After the meal had been concluded the work of taking the gold on board was begun, and before nine o'clock the yacht was slipping swiftly out of the harbor, heading for Nassau, all her white sails filled by a strong north-westerly breeze.

Instead of going directly to New York, it was Mr. Vandyne's intention to run down the shoal for the

purpose of sending wreckers to the key, in the hope of saving such cargo from the Bonita as was on or near the island.

The three boys were standing aft as she passed the point where Walter had done duty as sentinel with such happy results, and it was very difficult for either to restrain his joy at thus bidding adieu to the key.

"When I get my ship I won't come within a hundred miles of this place," Jim said emphatically; and his companions were quite positive it would not give them any pleasure to return.

Swiftly the gallant yacht sped on, bowing her long, tapering spars to the ocean swell, until the key was hardly more than a spot of blue on the horizon, and the accidental cruise was well-nigh at an end.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NASSAU.

THE THREE boys and Joe were given quarters in the yacht's cabin, but nothing Mr. Vandyne could say would induce Bob to remain aft.

"For an old shell-back like me the only place is the fo'castle," he said in reply to all their arguments. "It don't stand to reason that a sailor would be comfortable anywhere else, an' I'd be like a fish out of water if I couldn't go on watch with the others of my kind."

"But what's the use of working when father expects you to be his guest?" Harry asked; and Bob replied, with a hearty laugh:

"Workin'? Why it's nothin' more'n the rarest kind of a lark to help handle a craft like this! She's fitter for a gold frame an' hung up as a' ornament than to carry sich old barnacles as me! Bless you, lad, I wouldn't miss my trick at the wheel on a beauty like this any sooner'n I'd lose the gold we've had so much trouble in the savin'!"

Mr. Vandyne recognized the fact that the voyage would indeed be a disagreeable one to the old sailor if he was forced to play the part of passenger, and nothing more was said on the subject, although both

Harry and Walter tried in vain many times afterward to coax him into the cabin at meal time.

It may be supposed that the boys had experienced so many trials on the sea that they simply looked forward to being on land once more, surrounded by the comforts of home; but this was not so. The Lorlie was in every respect a beautiful craft, and sailing in her was so different from what it had been on the brig that it seemed almost like another kind of traveling. This, in connection with the fact that all mental troubles were banished, served to make the short trip to Nassau most enjoyable.

It would be necessary for Mr. Vandyne to remain at this port two or three days in order to complete the preparations for saving the Bonita's cargo; but no one thought of taking up quarters on shore when it was possible to live so comfortably aboard the yacht.

And now a word is necessary to explain why Harry's father interested himself in this work, which at first thought would seem too trifling to cause an extension of the cruise when Mrs. Vandyne and Mrs. Morse were anxiously waiting to greet once more the sons whom they had mourned as dead. This explanation seems to be the final link in the chain of mysterious or unaccountable occurrences which went to make up the career of the runaway brig.

Mr. Vandyne owned one-third of the Bonita, and the first intimation he had of her abandonment was through the newspaper article which apprised him

of his son's safety; therefore his business in Nassau was concerning the saving of his own property. It did seem remarkable, however, that Harry had been carried off by one of his father's vessels which at the time was supposed to be half-way across the Atlantic.

"I am confident that Bob's theory as to the reason for her abandonment is the correct one," Mr. Vandyne said shortly after leaving the key, when they were discussing the matter, "and my reason for the belief is founded on a similar accident which happened to one of the first vessels I ever owned. She was bound to Genoa from New Orleans, also with a cargo of alcohol. One day during moderately fine weather there was a sudden explosion in the hold, which burst the tarpaulin and shattered the hatch. The captain saw dense volumes of what he thought smoke, and ordered all hands to abandon ship. They did get into the boats, but before casting off had the same experience you had, and the ship was saved. In the Bonita's case I have no doubt but that the boats foundered shortly after the crew left, although possibly they were picked up by some outward-bound craft, and we shall hear from them later."

It was necessary for those who had been taken from the key to spend no small amount of time on shore giving evidence concerning the loss of the brig, that there might be no delay regarding payment of the insurance; and while attending to these matters they met an old acquaintance to whom they were deeply indebted.

This was none other than the captain of the schooner which had visited the island in search of the murderers, and who gave the information leading to their rescue.

"I was jes' thinkin' I'd run across the shoals an' see how you was gettin' on," he said, after a hearty greeting; "but I reckoned you had the steamer patched up before I got back from the States."

Joe related briefly their misadventures on the key, and also the particulars of the rescue, concluding by asking if the red-nosed man and his companions had been captured.

"I'm mighty glad that what we did in Savannah brought your friends on. I'd been blamin' myself for not stoppin' here when we come back; but as things turned out, a delay of two hours would 'a' given them villains the chance of showin' us their heels."

"Then you caught 'em?" Bob asked eagerly.

"That's jes' what we did, an' no mistake, though it was a close shave. We was comin' down past Egg Key, with a full breeze, when I saw a yawl edgin' inshore, like as if her crew wanted to get out of sight. None of us expected that gang was aboard, knowin' as how they'd stole your brig; but I thought it wouldn't do any harm to cut in between them and the land. Two hours later an' they'd 'a' been on the shoals, where we couldn't follow."

"Did they show fight?" Bob asked.

"They attempted to, but we was fixed for jes' sich a crowd. When we hove-to not fifty yards off,

an' showed the muzzles of half a dozen rifles, every one of 'em quieted down like lambs. We clapped irons on the gang, an' next day they were here in jail. It was hard work to prove the murder on 'em, although everybody knew they did it. They were sentenced yesterday to twenty years' imprisonment, an' us who live around here feel a good deal more easy in mind, because it wasn't safe for a man to travel very far alone while they were free."

Then the captain insisted on the boys going with him to the coral-reefs, where the spongers were at work, and a very pleasant afternoon did they spend.

There were to be seen, by aid of a glass, sponges of all varieties, from the "sheep's wool" and "velvet" to the bright scarlet "gloves," which grow in the shape of huge hands, and owe their peculiar color to the insects which build them. Reef-sponges, yet covered with their manufacturers and black as a coal; wire sponges, and gray ones, fashioned in the form of a cup; sponges of all shapes and hues, until the shoal looked like a garden of brilliantly-colored flowers which had been suddenly inundated.

The boys collected a huge store of curious things, among which was no small amount of purple and yellow fans, stars and trees of coral, which is so much more beautiful when living, and in the sea, than the dried specimens we see on land.

The day's pleasuring was brought to a close by a visit to the sponge-yard, where the Captain's guests learned very much about this branch of industry, which in the Bahamas alone gives employment to several thousand persons and five or six hundred vessels.

It was very like a revelation to them when the hospitable Captain explained that there were several grades of each variety of sheep-wool, white-reef, dark-reef, abaco, velvet, grass, boat, hard-head, yellow and glove sponges, all worth from five to ten cents per pound by the quantity; and, also, that when first taken from the water a sponge is useless for mechanical or domestic purposes.

Probably every boy knows that a sponge, as we see it, is only the skeleton of an organism. When first gathered it is covered with a thick, black, gelatinous substance which must be removed. Then it is sorted, clipped, soaked in lime-water, and dried in the sun before being compressed into hundred-pound packages.

It would be impossible to learn all that is really interesting concerning the sponge in one short article, or during a single visit to the yards; and Jim was so impressed with this fact that he said to Harry, when the latter hurried him away because the yacht's boat was waiting for them:

"The first thing I buy out of my share of the money will be a book about these things, an' then I'll know a good deal more than I do now."

On the third day after their arrival the boys saw a freighting-schooner, with a large crew of men, set sail for the key on which they had lived so long, to save what was left of the Bonita and her cargo.

This completed the business for which they had visited Nassau—the wreckers being instructed to carry their find to New York—and word was given

that every one should be ready for an early start homeward next morning.

"You've had adventures enough for one year, and can well afford to study hard until next summer," Mr. Vandyne said as he announced the early departure of the Lorlie; and, hearing the words, a troubled look came over Jim's face.

"We're ready for any amount of work at school after our accidental cruise," Harry replied promptly; "but what is to become of Jim?"

"He will go home, of course, after receiving his share of the pirates' treasure."

"But he hasn't a relative in the world, and it seems too bad for him to go on board the Mary Walker now that he has money enough to pay for a good education."

Mr. Vandyne questioned the young fisherman at great length, and then he said:

"You will be able to do as you choose, because the accidental cruise has made all hands moderately wealthy; therefore I am not offering anything like charity when I say you can live with Harry until some permanent arrangement is made. We will have a legal guardian appointed, that the money shall not be squandered, and you need not feel much anxiety as to the future until the time comes when you decide upon an occupation."

Jim tried to thank Mr. Vandyne, but failed signally; and to hide his confusion he scuttled off to the forecastle, where he told Bob the good news, concluding by saying:

"I'm through bein' rope's-ended by a crew of fishermen whenever they feel a little grouty, an' you jes' bet I'll study hard, now I've got a chance. But how will I ever see you ag'in?"

"Why, bless you, lad, I'm goin' to stay close 'round there—sorter in the same family. Mr. Vandyne is a ship-owner, an' has plenty of work for an old shell-back like me. Joe an' I have both signed with him, an' whenever you want to know anything what can't be found in books, jes' shape a course for the docks an' ask Bob Brace."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NEW YORK.

OF THE voyage to New York it is hardly necessary to speak, because nothing of an exciting or an interesting nature occurred. The wind favored the Lorlie to such an extent that not a rope was started from the time of leaving Nassau until she crossed the bar at Sandy Hook. The trip was as devoid of incident as the previous one in the Bonita had been filled with dangers and sorrows; and two hours after the yacht dropped anchor off Staten Island, Harry and Walter were clasped in their mothers' arms.

The accidental cruise in a runaway brig was ended at last; and, fortunately, no harm had come from what at one time seemed certain would be attended with gravest dangers.

It only remains now to chronicle the events which immediately followed their arrival; not because of any relation to the story already told, but owing to the influence they may exercise upon the future movements of the three boys.

First, and at present the most important, is, How much treasure did they bring home?

Mr. Vandyne was forced to engage the services of an expert money-changer in order to learn this fact himself; and, to the surprise of all, it was found that the bags averaged a trifle more than eighteen thousand dollars apiece, making a grand total of three hundred and forty-two thousand six hundred dollars. This was divided equally among the five who had been imprisoned on the key, and for the

first time in his life Bob Brace enjoyed the distinction of being what he called "a blooming capitalist."

It was no longer necessary for either the old sailor or Joe to do any very hard work; but as both preferred some kind of employment, and that which Mr. Vandyne offered was exactly suited to their ideas of ease, if not luxury, they concluded to hold to the agreement already made.

While the money was being divided, Bob insisted very strongly that Harry's father should take a certain amount to repay him for the voyage to the Bahamas; but this was refused in such a decided manner as to leave no opportunity for discussion.

"The treasure belongs to those who found it!" the merchant said; "and as I made the trip for the purpose of rescuing my son, there can be no question of payment. Yet I did have a reasonably profitable cruise, in addition to finding Harry. You were able to prove the loss of the Bonita, thus giving me an opportunity of claiming the insurance many months sooner than it could otherwise have been done; and, besides, I am expecting to realize something from salvage on the cargo."

Bob and Joe decided to invest a portion of their share of the treasure in a vessel, and Mr. Vandyne agreed to act as their agent in the transaction.

Three days after the arrival of the Lorlie the rescued party were engaged in their business, or pleasure, much as if they had never seen an island on the Bahama shoal.

Jim was living at Harry's home, and Mr. Vandyne was to be his guardian as soon as the necessary formalities could be complied with. Walter was at home, within a block of his friend, while the other two members of the party who had taken an accidental cruise were busily engaged in Mr. Vandyne's service.

On the fourth day after the Lorlie cast anchor off Staten Island the three boys went to the docks for the purpose of paying Bob and Joe a visit, and then the old sailor proposed such a scheme as met with the unqualified approval of all.

"I want you lads to look at a little steam yacht that's layin' at the next pier," Bob said; and as a matter of course the boys were more than willing to make such inspection, since, after their late experience, anything in the way of boats or vessels had a new interest for them.

The craft to which Bob and Joe led the party fully merited the praise which was bestowed so unstintedly. Her name was the Sea Foam, and she lie so jauntily on the water that one could but say it was in every way applicable to her.

"Fifty-five foot keel, nine foot beam, compound engines, sound as a dollar, and guaranteed to make fourteen knots an hour," Joe said, as he pointed to the little steamer. "She's the most perfect thing of her kind I ever saw."

The boys were not satisfied with gazing at her from the pier, but clambered on board, and a view of her interior arrangements only served to strengthen the good opinion formed by a single glance at the graceful lines of the hull.

The Sea Foam had a roomy after-cabin handsomely but not expensively furnished, on either side of which were four bunks, separated from the saloon by heavy draperies. Swinging lamps and trays, large mirrors, the polished woods and the shining metal-work gave an air of beauty and homeliness to this portion of the steamer such as the boys thought very charming.

Then the engine-room was visited, and although the three younger members of the party were not judges of machinery they could understand that Joe's words of praise were merited.

The forward cabin, which also served as dining-room, contained four bunks, and leading from it was as complete and convenient a galley and pantry as the most fastidious cook could have desired.

"Well, what do you think of her?" Bob asked, when the inspection was concluded.

"She's the handsomest craft I ever saw," Harry replied enthusiastically. "Who owns her?"

"A gentleman whose office is near your father's, and he wants to sell her. She's cheap at the price—three thousand—and my idea is that you boys couldn't do better than buy her. Then, next summer when you want to go off on a good time, Joe'll ship as engineer, I'll be crew, an' you'll only need a cook. She looks like a first-class sea-boat fit for any water."

It is needless to add that the boys were highly excited by this proposition; but as it was impossible to say that the purchase could be made until Mr. Vandyne and Mr. Morse had been consulted, Harry and Walter started for the former's office at full speed, leaving the remainder of the party on board until their return.

"Want to buy the Sea Foam, eh?" Mr. Vandyne said, when Harry pantingly asked him to come and look at the little steamer. "I examined her yesterday, and thought she would be a good pleasure-boat for you boys. Considering the fact that you've got more than money enough to make the purchase, I see no good reason why it shouldn't be done. I'll send a note to the owner, and you had better run down the bay on a trial trip. Tell Bob and Joe to stop work and go with you. Remember that while on the yacht the old sailor is to be obeyed as he was at the island."

To get an order for the dock-master to deliver the Sea Foam to the parties named in Mr. Vandyne's note it was only necessary to walk a short distance,

and in less than an hour after first seeing the yacht all hands were on board, steaming down the bay at a trifle more than a fifteen-knot rate.

One trip was sufficient to convince the boys that the little craft was essential to their happiness, and even Bob and Joe were so pleased with her that it is quite probable they might have been tempted to purchase her themselves in case the young capitalists had not decided in favor of the scheme.

"A two-weeks'-old baby might steer her if it knew enough," Bob said approvingly, as he stood at the wheel in the snug little pilot-house; "an' as for speed, why there's mighty few can touch her. We're gettin' a decently heavy swell now, an' her deck is as dry as a bone."

"Would you dare to go from here to the Bahamas in her?" Walter asked.

"Dare? Why, lad, she'd live in weather that would swamp many a bigger craft. You can cruise from here to South America in her, an' be a blessed sight more comfortable than ever we were on the old Bonita."

Joe had even more to say in the Sea Foam's favor than Bob, and he insisted stoutly that it was nothing more than play to act the part of engineer.

All this praise was needless, however, for the intending purchasers were more than pleased with the little craft, and their report to Mr. Vandyne was coupled with such urgent entreaties for him to close the bargain before any one else could take advantage of the offer that by noon of the next day she was transferred to Messrs. Vandyne, Morse & Libby

These young gentlemen are already making preparations to spend next summer on board the Sea Foam, and when they start it is safe to say the cruise will not be accidental.

THE END.

A. L. Burt's Catalogue of Books for Young People by Popular Writers, 52-58 Duane Street, New York

BOOKS FOR BOYS.

Joe's Luck: A Boy's Adventures in California. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

The story is chock full of stirring incidents, while the amusing situations are furnished by Joshua Bickford, from Pumpkin Hollow, and the fellow who modestly styles himself the "Rip-tail Roarer, from Pike Co., Missouri." Mr. Alger never writes a poor book, and "Joe's Luck" is certainly one of his best.

Tom the Bootblack; or, The Road to Success. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

A bright, enterprising lad was Tom the Bootblack. He was not at all ashamed of his humble calling, though always on the lookout to better himself. The lad started for Cincinnati to look up his heritage. Mr. Grey, the uncle, did not hesitate to employ a ruffian to kill the lad. The plan failed, and Gilbert Grey, once Tom the bootblack, came into a comfortable fortune. This is one of Mr. Alger's best stories.

Dan the Newsboy. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Dan Mordaunt and his mother live in a poor tenement, and the lad is pluckily trying to make ends meet by selling papers in the streets of New York. A little heiress of six years is confided to the care of the Mordaunts. The child is kidnapped and Dan tracks the child to the house where she is hidden, and rescues her. The wealthy aunt of the little heiress is so delighted with Dan's courage and many good qualities that she adopts him as her heir.

Tony the Hero: A Brave Boy's Adventure with a Tramp. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Tony, a sturdy bright-eyed boy of fourteen, is under the control of Rudolph Rugg, a thorough rascal. After much abuse Tony runs away and gets a job as stable boy in a country hotel. Tony is heir to a large estate. Rudolph for a consideration hunts up Tony and throws him down a deep well. Of course Tony escapes from the fate provided for him, and by a brave act, a rich friend secures his rights and Tony is prosperous. A very entertaining book.

The Errand Boy; or, How Phil Brent Won Success. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth illustrated, price $1.00.

The career of "The Errand Boy" embraces the city adventures of a smart country lad. Philip was brought up by a kind-hearted innkeeper named Brent. The death of Mrs. Brent paved the way for the hero's subsequent troubles. A retired merchant in New York secures him the situation of errand boy, and thereafter stands as his friend.

Tom Temple's Career. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Tom Temple is a bright, self-reliant lad. He leaves Plympton village to seek work in New York, whence he undertakes an important mission to California. Some of his adventures in the far west are so startling that the reader will scarcely close the book until the last page shall have been reached. The tale is written in Mr. Alger's most fascinating style.

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BOOKS FOR BOYS.

Frank Fowler, the Cash Boy. By HORATIO ALGER, JR.

12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Frank Fowler, a poor boy, bravely determines to make a living for himself and his foster-sister Grace. Going to New York he obtains a situation as cash boy in a dry goods store. He renders a service to a wealthy old gentleman who takes a fancy to the lad, and thereafter helps the lad to gain success and fortune.

Tom Thatcher's Fortune. By HORATIO ALGER, JR.

12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Tom Thatcher is a brave, ambitious, unselfish boy. He supports his mother and sister on meagre wages earned as a shoe-pegger in John Simpson's factory. Tom is discharged from the factory and starts overland for California. He meets with many adventures. The story is told in a way which has made Mr. Alger's name a household word in so many homes.

The Train Boy. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Paul Palmer was a wide-awake boy of sixteen who supported his mother and sister by selling books and papers on the Chicago and Milwaukee Railroad. He detects a young man in the act of picking the pocket of a young lady. In a railway accident many passengers are killed, but Paul is fortunate enough to assist a Chicago merchant, who out of gratitude takes him into his employ. Paul succeeds with tact and judgment and is well started on the road to business prominence.

Mark Mason's Victory. The Trials and Triumphs of a Telegraph Boy. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Mark Mason, the telegraph boy, was a sturdy, honest lad, who pluckily won his way to success by his honest manly efforts under many difficulties. This story will please the very large class of boys who regard Mr. Alger as a favorite author.

A Debt of Honor. The Story of Gerald Lane's Success in the Far West. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

The story of Gerald Lane and the account of the many trials and disappointments which he passed through befor he attained success, will interest all boys who have read the previous stories of this delightful author.

Ben Bruce. Scenes in the Life of a Bowery Newsboy. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Ben Bruce was a brave, manly, generous boy. The story of his efforts, and many seeming failures and disappointments, and his final success, are most interesting to all readers. The tale is written in Mr. Alger's most fascinating style.

The Castaways; or, On the Florida Reefs. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

This tale smacks of the salt sea. From the moment that the Sea Queen leaves lower New York bay till the breeze leaves her becalmed off the coast of Florida, one can almost hear the whistle of the wind through her rigging, the creak of her straining cordage as she heels to the leeward. The adventures of Ben Clark, the hero of the story and Jake the cook, cannot fail to charm the reader. As a writer for young people Mr. Otis is a prime favorite.

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BOOKS FOR BOYS.

Wrecked on Spider Island; or, How Ned Rogers Found

the Treasure. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Ned Rogers, a "down-east" plucky lad ships as cabin boy to earn a livelihood. Ned is marooned on Spider Island, and while there discovers a wreck submerged in the sand, and finds a considerable amount of treasure. The capture of the treasure and the incidents of the voyage serve to make as entertaining a story of sea-life as the most captious boy could desire.

The Search for the Silver City: A Tale of Adventure in

Yucatan. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Two lads, Teddy Wright and Neal Emery, embark on the steam yacht Day Dream for a cruise to the tropics. The yacht is destroyed by fire, and then the boat is cast upon the coast of Yucatan. They hear of the wonderful Silver City, of the Chan Santa Cruz Indians, and with the help of a faithful Indian ally carry off a number of the golden images from the temples. Pursued with relentless vigor at last their escape is effected in an astonishing manner. The story is so full of exciting incidents that the reader is quite carried away with the novelty and realism of the narrative.

A Runaway Brig; or, An Accidental Cruise. By

JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

This is a sea tale, and the reader can look out upon the wide shimmering sea as it flashes back the sunlight, and imagine himself afloat with Harry Vandyne, Walter Morse, Jim Libby and that old shell-back, Bob Brace, on the brig Bonita. The boys discover a mysterious document which enables them to find a buried treasure. They are stranded on an island and at last are rescued with the treasure. The boys are sure to be fascinated with this entertaining story.

The Treasure Finders: A Boy's Adventures in

Nicaragua. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Roy and Dean Coloney, with their guide Tongla, leave their father's indigo plantation to visit the wonderful ruins of an ancient city. The boys eagerly explore the temples of an extinct race and discover three golden images cunningly hidden away. They escape with the greatest difficulty. Eventually they reach safety with their golden prizes. We doubt if there ever was written a more entertaining story than "The Treasure Finders."

Jack, the Hunchback. A Story of the Coast of Maine.

By JAMES OTIS. Price $1.00.

This is the story of a little hunchback who lived on Cape Elizabeth, on the coast of Maine. His trials and successes are most interesting. From first to last nothing stays the interest of the narrative. It bears us along as on a stream whose current varies in direction, but never loses its force.

With Washington at Monmouth: A Story of Three

Philadelphia Boys. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, ornamental cloth, olivine edges, illustrated, price $1.50.

Three Philadelphia lads assist the American spies and make regular and frequent visits to Valley Forge in the Winter while the British occupied the city. The story abounds with pictures of Colonial life skillfully drawn, and the glimpses of Washington's soldiers which are given shown that the work has not been hastily done, or without considerable study. The story is wholesome and patriotic in tone, as are all of Mr. Otis' works.

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With Lafayette at Yorktown: A Story of How Two

Boys Joined the Continental Army. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, ornamental cloth, olivine edges, illustrated, price $1.50.

Two lads from Portmouth, N. H., attempt to enlist in the Colonial Army, and are given employment as spies. There is no lack of exciting incidents which the youthful reader craves, but it is healthful excitement brimming with facts which every boy should be familiar with, and while the reader is following the adventures of Ben Jaffrays and Ned Allen he is acquiring a fund of historical lore which will remain in his memory long after that which he has memorized from textbooks has been forgotten.

At the Siege of Havana. Being the Experiences of

Three Boys Serving under Israel Putnam in 1762. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, ornamental cloth, olivine edges, illustrated, price $1.50.

"At the Siege of Havana" deals with that portion of the island's history when the English king captured the capital, thanks to the assistance given by the troops from New England, led in part by Col. Israel Putnam.

The principal characters are Darius Lunt, the lad who, represented as telling the story, and his comrades, Robert Clement and Nicholas Vallet. Colonel Putnam also figures to considerable extent, necessarily, in the tale, and the whole forms one of the most readable stories founded on historical facts.

The Defense of Fort Henry. A Story of Wheeling

Creek in 1777. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, ornamental cloth, olivine edges, illustrated, price $1.50.

Nowhere in the history of our country can be found more heroic or thrilling incidents than in the story of those brave men and women who founded the settlement of Wheeling in the Colony of Virginia. The recital of what Elizabeth Zane did is in itself as heroic a story as can be imagined. The wondrous bravery displayed by Major McCulloch and his gallant comrades, the sufferings of the colonists and their sacrifice of blood and life, stir the blood of old as well as young readers.

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New York Boys in 1776. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, ornamental cloth, olivine edges, price $1.50.

"During the British occupancy of New York, at the outbreak of the Revolution, a Yankee lad hears of the plot to take General Washington's person, and calls in two companions to assist the patriot cause. They do some astonishing things, and, incidentally, lay the way for an American navy later, by the exploit which gives its name to the work. Mr. Otis' books are too well known to require any particular commendation to the young."—Evening Post.

With Warren at Bunker Hill. A Story of the Siege of

Boston. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, ornametnal cloth, olivine edges, illustrated, price $1.50.

"This is a tale of the siege of Boston, which opens on the day after the doings at Lexington and Concord, with a description of home life in Boston, introduces the reader to the British camp at Charlestown, shows Gen. Warren at home, describes what a boy thought of the battle of Bunker Hill, and closes with the raising of the siege. The three heroes, George Wentworth, Ben Scarlett and an old ropemaker, incur the enmity of a young Tory, who causes them many adventures the boys will like to read."—Detroit Free Press.

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BOOKS FOR BOYS.

With the Swamp Fox. The Story of General Marion's Spies. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

This story deals with General Francis Marion's heroic struggle in the Carolinas. General Marion's arrival to take command of these brave men and rough riders is pictured as a boy might have seen it, and although the story is devoted to what the lads did, the Swamp Fox is ever present in the mind of the reader.

On the Kentucky Frontier. A Story of the Fighting Pioneers of the West. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.

In the history of our country there is no more thrilling story than that of the work done on the Mississippi river by a handful of frontiersmen. Mr. Otis takes the reader on that famous expedition from the arrival of Major Clarke's force at Corn Island, until Kaskaskia was captured. He relates that part of Simon Kenton's life history which is not usually touched upon either by the historian or the story teller. This is one of the most entertaining books for young people which has been published.

Sarah Dillard's Ride. A Story of South Carolina in in 1780. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

"This book deals with the Carolinas in 1780, giving a wealth of detail of the Mountain Men who struggled so valiantly against the king's troops. Major Ferguson is the prominent British officer of the story, which is told as though coming from a youth who experienced these adventures. In this way the famous ride of Sarah Dillard is brought out as an incident of the plot."—**Boston Journal.**

A Tory Plot. A Story of the Attempt to Kill General Washington. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

"'A Tory Plot' is the story of two lads who overhear something of the plot originated during the Revolution by Gov. Tryon to capture or murder Washington. They communicate their knowledge to Gen. Putnam and are commissioned by him to play the role of detectives in the matter. They do so, and meet with many adventures and hairbreadth escapes. The boys are, of course, mythical, but they serve to enable the author to put into very attractive shape much valuable knowledge concerning one phase of the Revolution."—**Pittsburgh Times.**

A Traitor's Escape. A Story of the Attempt to Seize Benedict Arnold. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

"This is a tale with stirring scenes depicted in each chapter, bringing clearly before the mind the glorious deeds of the early settlers in this country. In an historical work dealing with this country's past, no plot can hold the attention closer than this one, which describes the attempt and partial success of Benedict Arnold's escape to New York, where he remained as the guest of Sir Henry Clinton. All those who actually figured in the arrest of the traitor, as well as Gen. Washington, are included as characters."—**Albany Union.**

A Cruise with Paul Jones. A Story of Naval Warfare in 1776. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

"This story takes up that portion of Paul Jones' adventurous life when he was hovering off the British coast, watching for an opportunity to strike the enemy a blow. It deals more particularly with his descent upon Whitehaven, the seizure of Lady Selkirk's plate, and the famous battle with the Drake. The boy who figures in the tale is one who was taken from a derelict by Paul Jones shortly after this particular cruise was begun."—**Chicago Inter-Ocean.**

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Morgan, the Jersey Spy. A Story of the Siege of Yorktown in 1781. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

"The two lads who are utilized by the author to emphasize the details of the work done during that memorable time were real boys who lived on the banks of the York river, and who aided the Jersey spy in his dangerous occupation. In the guise of fishermen the lads visit Yorktown, are suspected of being spies, and put under arrest. Morgan risks his life to save them. The final escape, the thrilling encounter with a squad of red coats, when they are exposed equally to the bullets of friends and foes, told in a masterly fashion, makes of this volume one of the most entertaining books of the year."—**Inter-Ocean.**

The Young Scout: The Story of a West Point Lieutenant. By EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

The crafty Apache chief Geronimo but a few years ago was the most terrible scourge of the southwest border. The author has woven, in a tale of thrilling interest, all the incidents of Geronimo's last raid. The hero is Lieutenant James Decker, a recent graduate of West Point. Ambitious to distinguish himself the young man takes many a desperate chance against the enemy and on more than one occasion narrowly escapes with his life. In our opinion Mr. Ellis is the best writer of Indian stories now before the public.

Adrift in the Wilds: The Adventures of Two Shipwrecked Boys. By EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Elwood Brandon and Howard Lawrence are en route for San Francisco. Off the coast of California the steamer takes fire. The two boys reach the shore with several of the passengers. Young Brandon becomes separated from his party and is captured by hostile Indians, but is afterwards rescued. This is a very entertaining narrative of Southern California.

A Young Hero; or, Fighting to Win. By EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

This story tells how a valuable solid silver service was stolen from the Misses Perkinpine, two very old and simple minded ladies. Fred Sheldon, the hero of this story, undertakes to discover the thieves and have them arrested. After much time spent in detective work, he succeeds in discovering the silver plate and winning the reward. The story is told in Mr. Ellis' most fascinating style. Every boy will be glad to read this delightful book.

Lost in the Rockies. A Story of Adventure in the Rocky Mountains. By EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.

Incident succeeds incident, and adventure is piled upon adventure, and at the end the reader, be he boy or man, will have experienced breathless enjoyment in this romantic story describing many adventures in the Rockies and among the Indians.

BOOKS FOR BOYS.

A Jaunt Through Java: The Story of a Journey to the Sacred Mountain. By EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

The interest of this story is found in the thrilling adventures of two cousins, Hermon and Eustace Hadley, on their trip acrosss the island of Java, from Samarang to the Sacred Mountain. In a land where the Royal Bengal tiger, the rhinoceros, and other fierce beasts are to be met with, it is but natural that the heroes of this book should have a lively experience. There is not a dull page in the book.

The Boy Patriot. A Story of Jack, the Young Friend of Washington. By EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, olivine edges, illustrated, price $1.50.

"There are adventures of all kinds for the hero and his friends, whose pluck and ingenuity in extricating themselves from awkward fixes are always equal to the occasion. It is an excellent story full of honest, manly, patriotic efforts on the part of the hero. A very vivid description of the battle of Trenton is also found in this story."—**Journal of Education.**

A Yankee Lad's Pluck. How Bert Larkin Saved his Father's Ranch in Porto Rico. By WM. P. CHIPMAN. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

"Bert Larkin, the hero of the story, early excites our admiration, and is altogether a fine character such as boys will delight in, whilst the story of his numerous adventures is very graphically told. This will, we think, prove one of the most popular boys' books this season."—**Gazette.**

A Brave Defense. A Story of the Massacre at Fort Griswold in 1781. By WILLIAM P. CHIPMAN. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Perhaps no more gallant fight against fearful odds took place during the Revolutionary War than that at Fort Griswold, Groton Heights, Conn., in 1781. The boys are real boys who were actually on the muster rolls, either at Fort Trumbull on the New London side, or of Fort Griswold on the Groton side of the Thames. The youthful reader who follows Halsey Sanford and Levi Dart and Tom Malleson, and their equally brave comrades, through their thrilling adventures will be learning something more than historical facts; they will be imbibing lessons of fidelity, of bravery, of heroism, and of manliness, which must prove serviceable in the arena of life.

The Young Minuteman. A Story of the Capture of General Prescott in 1777. By WILLIAM P. CHIPMAN. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

This story is based upon actual events which occurred during the British occupation of the waters of Narragansett Bay. Darius Wale and William Northrop belong to "the coast patrol." The story is a strong one, dealing only with actual events. There is, however, no lack of thrilling adventure, and every lad who is fortunate enough to obtain the book will find not only that his historical knowledge is increased, but that his own patriotism and love of country are deepened.

For the Temple: A Tale of the Fall of Jerusalem. By G. A. HENTY. With illustrations by S. J. SOLOMON. 12mo, cloth, olivine edges, price $1.00.

"Mr. Henty's graphic prose picture of the hopeless Jewish resistance to Roman sway adds another leaf to his record of the famous wars of the world. The book is one of Mr. Henty's cleverest efforts."—**Graphic.**

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Roy Gilbert's Search: A Tale of the Great Lakes. By Wm. P. Chipman. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

A deep mystery hangs over the parentage of Roy Gilbert. He arranges with two schoolmates to make a tour of the Great Lakes on a steam launch. The three boys visit many points of interest on the lakes. Afterwards the lads rescue an elderly gentleman and a lady from a sinking yacht. Later on the boys narrowly escape with their lives. The hero is a manly, self-reliant boy, whose adventures will be followed with interest.

The Slate Picker: The Story of a Boy's Life in the Coal Mines. By Harry Prentice. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

This is a story of a boy's life in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. Ben Burton, the hero, had a hard road to travel, but by grit and energy he advanced step by step until he found himself called upon to fill the position of chief engineer of the Kohinoor Coal Company. This is a book of extreme interest to every boy reader.

The Boy Cruisers; or, Paddling in Florida. By St. George Rathborne. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00

Andrew George and Rowland Carter start on a canoe trip along the Gulf coast, from Key West to Tampa, Florida. Their first adventure is with a pair of rascals who steal their boats. Next they run into a gale in the Gulf. After that they have a lively time with alligators and Andrew gets into trouble with a band of Seminole Indians. Mr. Rathborne knows just how to interest the boys, and lads who are in search of a rare treat will do well to read this entertaining story.

Captured by Zulus: A Story of Trapping in Africa. By Harry Prentice. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

This story details the adventures of two lads, Dick Elsworth and Bob Harvey, in the wilds of South Africa. By stratagem the Zulus capture Dick and Bob and take them to their principal kraal or village. The lads escape death by digging their way out of the prison hut by night. They are pursued, but the Zulus finally give up pursuit. Mr. Prentice tells exactly how wild-beast collectors secure specimens on their native stamping grounds, and these descriptions make very entertaining reading.

Tom the Ready; or, Up from the Lowest. By Randolph Hill. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

This is a dramatic narrative of the unaided rise of a fearless, ambitious boy from the lowest round of fortune's ladder to wealth and the governorship of his native State. Tom Seacomb begins life with a purpose, and eventually overcomes those who oppose him. How he manages to win the battle is told by Mr. Hill in a masterful way that thrills the reader and holds his attention and sympathy to the end.

Captain Kidd's Gold: The True Story of an Adventurous Sailor Boy. By James Franklin Fitts. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

There is something fascinating to the average youth in the very idea of buried treasure. A vision arises before his eyes of swarthy Portuguese and Spanish rascals, with black beards and gleaming eyes. There were many famous sea rovers, but none more celebrated than Capt. Kidd. Paul Jones Garry inherits a document which locates a considerable treasure buried by two of Kidd's crew. The hero of this book is an ambitious, persevering lad, of salt-water New England ancestry, and his efforts to reach the island and secure the money form one of the most absorbing tales for our youth that has come from the press.

BOOKS FOR BOYS.

The Boy Explorers: The Adventures of Two Boys in Alaska. By HARRY PRENTICE. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Two boys, Raymond and Spencer Manning, travel to Alaska to join their father in search of their uncle. On their arrival at Sitka the boys with an Indian guide set off across the mountains. The trip is fraught with perils that test the lads' courage to the utmost. All through their exciting adventures the lads demonstrate what can be accomplished by pluck and resolution, and their experience makes one of the most interesting tales ever written.

The Island Treasure; or, Harry Darrel's Fortune. By FRANK H. CONVERSE. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Harry Darrel, having received a nautical training on a school-ship, is bent on going to sea. A runaway horse changes his prospects. Harry saves Dr. Gregg from drowning and afterward becomes sailing-master of a sloop yacht. Mr. Converse's stories possess a charm of their own which is appreciated by lads who delight in good healthy tales that smack of salt water.

Guy Harris: The Runaway. By HARRY CASTLEMON. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.00.

Guy Harris lived in a small city on the shore of one of the Great Lakes. He is persuaded to go to sea, and gets a glimpse of the rough side of life in a sailor's boarding house. He ships on a vessel and for five months leads a hard life. The book will interest boys generally on account of its graphic style. This is one of Castlemon's most attractive stories.

Julian Mortimer: A Brave Boy's Struggle for Home and Fortune. By HARRY CASTLEMON. 12mo, cloth, illustrated, price $1.

The scene of the story lies west of the Mississippi River, in the days when emigrants made their perilous way across the great plains to the land of gold. There is an attack upon the wagon train by a large party of Indians. Our hero is a lad of uncommon nerve and pluck. Befriended by a stalwart trapper, a real rough diamond, our hero achieves the most happy results.

By Pike and Dyke: A Tale of the Rise of the Dutch Republic. By G. A. HENTY. With illustrations by MAYNARD BROWN. 12mo, cloth, olivine edges, price $1.00.

"Boys with a turn for historical research will be enchanted with the book, while the rest who only care for adventure will be students in spite of themselves."—St. James's Gazette.

St. George for England: A Tale of Cressy and Poitiers. By G. A. HENTY. With illustrations by GORDON BROWNE. 12mo, cloth, olivine edges, price $1.00.

"A story of very great interest for boys. In his own forcible style the author has endeavored to show that determination and enthusiasm can accomplish marvellous results; and that courage is generally accompanied by magnanimity and gentleness."—Pall Mall Gazette.

Captain Bayley's Heir: A Tale of the Gold Fields of California. By G. A. HENTY. With illustrations by H. M. PAGET. 12mo, cloth, olivine edges, price $1.00.

"Mr. Henty is careful to mingle instruction with entertainment; and the humorous touches, especially in the sketch of John Holl, the Westminster dustman, Dickens himself could hardly have excelled."—Christian Leader.

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BOOKS FOR BOYS.

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